

The Symphony of Sentience, in Cosmos and Life: In Memoriam Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka



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Abstract In this tribute to Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, I examine whether phenomenology, as a cognitive enterprise of sentience, extends beyond the death of the physical body. The symphonic form of this paper is inspired by Tymieniecka's *Metaphysical Rhapsodies of Faith*. The paper's First Movement, *Allegro*, sets the stage by drawing distinctions between the concept of sentience in the Phenomenology of Life and that of the intentionality of consciousness as viewed in cognitive phenomenology with its strong Husserlian legacy. The Second Movement, *Moderato*, follows the thread of sentience in the labyrinth of life through the ontopoietic patterns of complexity and emergence in both animate and inanimate nature. The Third Movement, *Minuet*, shows the hylomorphic unity of sentience and patterns of complexity in the nonlinear dynamics of the brain, and discusses qualia of thought, and the informational patterns of consciousness. Sentience is claimed to be a cosmic property which is appropriated by the phenomenologically material subjectivity. Since the intuition of life is the self-revelation of sentience, intuition of life continues in dying and has no reason not to continue beyond. The Fourth Movement, *Finale Glorioso*, describes patterns of sentience in the soul's final ascent, and honors the intuitional gifts that proceed from the passage of a great soul.

Keywords Tymieniecka · Phenomenology of life · Sentience · Intentionality · Complexity · Consciousness · Death and dying · Cosmos

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Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka's book *The Fullness of the Logos in the Key of Life*, Book II: *Christo-Logos, Metaphysical Rhapsodies of Faith* (*Analecta Husserliana*, 2013) is a soliloquy with variations on the themes of beauty, creativity, and the sacred. Appearing after it *Art, Literature and the Passion of the Skies*, it serves as a Chorus on the themes outlined in the *Metaphysical Rhapsodies*. Why did this philosopher talk to the themes of beauty, creativity, and the sacred at the close of her discourse? How do these themes contribute to the turn from the Phenomenology of Life to the Philosophy of Life, which was announced in the *Metaphysical Rhapsodies of Faith*?

An experience of beauty is salutary. According to the Sufi metaphysics, beauty is an antidote to egotism. An experience of beauty relaxes the mind and loosens the grip of the ego to open the road for the sacred in direct experience.¹ Likewise, a creative moment breaks through the consensus trance creating a window in which one can *see*.² Tymieniecka hasn't been writing directly about death, but beauty, creativity, and the sacred indirectly prepare the soul for dying. Death, in this case, is not an annihilation but, rather, a possibility for the new knowledge. Knowledge always has been of the highest value for Professor Tymieniecka. We see that the final turn from the Phenomenology of Life to the Philosophy of Life is not a mere re-categorization of an already-completed philosophical project.³ As had been the case with her great predecessors in Ancient Greek philosophy, the imminence of departure ignites a new insight.

Obviously, dying radically changes one's capacity for subjective self-reporting. As a phenomenologist of life, is there a way to understand not just the meaning of mortality, but the event of death itself? Tymieniecka stated many times that the intuition of life as a specific kind of intuition. According to Tymieniecka, life is grasped not only categorically in eidetic intuition, or as a meaning of life, but through the direct intuition of life as such.⁴ In this view, judgments of what is alive and what is not alive are made out of the pre-reflective, apperceptive primary facts of experience. Can an event of death appear as an alteration in this self-revelation of life?⁵ Can death be considered as a subjectively lived phenomenon? If dying takes time would a temporally extended intuition of change in self-revelation of life be available to subjective self-reporting and/or to phenomenological investigation? Does life and, with it, the Phenomenology of Life, end up where death begins?

It certainly appears that death is available only in an analysis of its meaning, in speculation, through ciphering. Perhaps, death is a concept related to biology, a death of a body, never visible to its subject, but only in relation to the other. Perhaps, death is not a metaphysical counterpart of life, not self-subsistent as is the latter. Death evaporates amidst life's appearances, in which each death of an earlier condition is superceded by a new stage of life. Turning to the concretum in the *Metaphysical Rhapsodies*, Tymieniecka transplants the lofty vision of the Phenomenology of Life into a psychospiritual, existential horizon. In life as *this* human life, and especially for a phenomenologist, death is tantalizing; like Savitri of the Indian legend by the same name, one wishes to interrogate death directly, to bring the great horrible Yama of Indic mythology into the light of description.⁶ Like Shvetaketu in the *Katha Upanishad*,⁷ the Philosopher-Phenomenologist draws from the confrontation with Death the final act of her phenomenological interrogations, and the understanding

of life, of the human predicament, and of the transnatural destiny of the soul. Like Ibn 'Arabi's Jesus, Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka witnesses and testifies against illusions of our finality. Via the brotherhood of those who turn to their internal ontopoietic source in search of the truth, the soul transcends its carnal beginnings. This is the existential-transcendental turn, from Phenomenology to Philosophy of Life, not in the manner of Hadot's "philosophy as a way of life"⁸ but, rather, in a Socratic way of dying as philosophy. One sees the record of phenomenological investigations, an intuitional switch in the living horizons of inquiry, and an actual life event (which is death) coming together. Tymieniecka's death brings together the acts of consciousness, the acts of communication, and the act of living, now one, like a crystal of salt. The difference between the written and the lived disappears.

What place does this existential-humanistic-transcendental-transnatural turn assume in Tymieniecka's Phenomenology of Life? Like many philosophers of direct intuition, Tymieniecka began with psychological and introspectionist agendas. At the close, she revisits her intellectual beginnings, but in a new manner: her intuition is free from psychologistic assumptions, the ontopoiesis of life is fully explicated. Guided by the Logos of her inquiry, she followed the thread of sentience in the labyrinth of life. All of her phenomenology, all of her philosophy is, basically, metaphysics. This lofty metaphysics underlies and contains all of this philosopher's expressions, human, as it were, in the cosmos and life. This knowledge is certain; therefore, the mind can now bounce back from the pristine metaphysical truths into the messiness of existential commitment. This "glass menagerie" of relationships, this bestiary of the heart, renders metaphysical gems of extreme importance. The patterns of revelation continue in all manifestations of life, whether lowly or holy. How does the Logos of Life show within the human, existential horizon? The missing link between the metaphysical *Imaginatio Creatrix* and human artistry is through spontaneity which now enters the philosophical discourse. The reflection on spontaneity leads to uncovering the main logoc expression within the existential horizon, which is the transnatural destiny of the soul. The finality of the biological body stands out now as a positive value, as a background against which the figures of the destiny can be seen, and its trans-natural terminus can be discerned.

A soliloquy turns into a dialogue. Tymieniecka asks, "Brethren, having covered this complete cycle together are we not truly, at last, Brethren" (Tymieniecka 2012a, 194)? Tethered to the same Logos, we must now extend the cycle of inquiry and articulate the phenomenology of life in death. This will be an act of phenomenological intuition and philosophical reflection, as well as an act of spontaneity in the human artistry. In Tymieniecka's strategy of knowledge, temporality is extremely important. The logos of things is revealed not through a static "what" but in a dynamic "how," from the primeval ontopoietic blossoming to the developed hierarchies of life. Like leaves coming out of a palm tree, rationalities and virtualities are incubated within the previous conditions and grow into the posterior conditions. Tymieniecka here writes simply, without neologisms or special terminology: like the Vedantic sages, she works within ordinary language, excavating the primary meanings that are tied to the prereflective, to the intuited reality of life.⁹ If ontopoiesis shows up in the metaphysical horizon as sentience within the existential human

horizon, in the innate messiness of experience, it shows up as spontaneity. On the stage of human life, spontaneity is an expression of transcendental creativity in each manifest moment of Life.

A prelude to the showing of spontaneity is the act of bracketing. First, one stops thinking that death equals annihilation and is a step into nonbeing; the fallacy of this assumption is based on an identification of consciousness with the appearance of the body. Next, comes a polar opposite, a “spiritual” assumption that death is a step into a primordial non-dual state, a sort of liberation from all impressions into undisturbed, content-less serenity in which the individual “I” dissolves into the Ocean of Being. The idea of such “return” is central in many spiritual paths. Together with Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, one shall ask: is such a primeval state, indeed, our destination in death or, for that matter, in the spiritual Enlightenment? An undifferentiated indivisibility – is that where the soul is heading? Tymieniecka answers: if such ground is thought of as a primeval state of man, it cannot be our destination; that would be the mind’s returning to the most primitive of its mental states. Such assumption needs to be dismissed; the “journey to the source” schema of things is thereby rejected. The creative process of life cannot involve a circular teleology in which one returns to life’s primitive state; therefore, we must seek the source of spontaneity through spontaneity itself. Tymieniecka says, “Experience as basically a spontaneity is obviously strictly individual, unshareable” (Tymieniecka 2012b, 1). From the depth of subjectivity, spontaneity drives the patterns of experience, the patterns of awareness, action, creativity, and ultimately, the weaving of destiny. Spontaneity creates the temporally extended existential patterns; are not these the same patterns that our old friend, sentience, designs for all the manifestation of life? Sentience walks the red carpet of existential expression unfolded by her handmaiden, spontaneity.

A human face of sentience dawns on us. Tymieniecka says:

How often have we forgotten all these acquired means [the existential and psychological dimensions of life], and started from a primitive germ in ourselves, on our own, without a spark of outward light or a word of courage. We have followed our inner spontaneity wherever it may lead us and thus step by step have dug into the soil of our being and along the sacred river where our roots plunge, have retraced the path, the winding path of the genesis of our authentic life. We have rediscovered the light within ourselves. (Tymieniecka 2012a, 194)

And, we may add, the self-same light shines on us from the outward edges of life. We intuit life by the recognition of sentience; sentience is in the breath of a rose, in the self-assembly of the protein molecules of the organic brine, and in the essence of the spiritual wisdom. She is us, and she is not us. As Ibn ‘Arabī puts it:

She displayed her front teeth, and a levin flashed,
and I knew not which of the twine rent the gloom.
And she said: “Is it not enough for him that I am in his heart,
and that he behold me at every moment? Is it not enough?” (Ibn ‘Arabi, 1978, 57)

Sentience we know by direct intuition. Intuition is generally thought of as the intentional knowledge. If the New Enlightenment, as heralded by Tymieniecka,¹⁰

proposes the possibility of new knowledge, must this knowledge be always intentional? Can there be a better knowledge, a more direct knowledge than the knowledge as “aboutness?” Can we know sentience as it is known to itself, in its marks on both sides of the subject-object equation?¹¹ Can there be consciousness beyond the enduring presence of subjectivity? As part of this tribute to Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, I wish to understand whether phenomenology, as a cognitive enterprise of sentience, extends beyond the death of the body. Another way of asking this will be: what is the meaning of resurrection in the New Enlightenment? Out of the many faces of sentience, which one is revealed in the modification of mental attitude created by dying? We will now follow the melodic fabric of Tymieniecka’s rhapsody of the trans-natural destiny of the soul, into phenomenology of death as it appears to us, to develop the theme into a full symphonic cycle.

A contour of this new enquiry is outlined by the idea of the trans-natural destiny of the soul. Such a mode of being must assume knowledge beyond the biological determinants of the human mind (in effect, of intentionality). An idea of the trans-natural destiny suggests that there must other ways of consciousness than is in the the biology of the human form. The associational fabric of Tymieniecka’s discourse enhances a new *Verstehen*, one that is non-sensory, non-intellectual, non-transcendental in phenomenological terms.¹² This may be the intuition of physics, of the neither direct nor indirect knowledge of Vedanta, an intuition of the phase shifts and nonlinear dynamics of complexity. In this intuition of essential substance, there is a key to the transcendence of subject-object dichotomies, of causality, of determinism and of all the traps of beginning-and-end schemata.¹³ In light of Tymieniecka’s departure, the logic of her last writings invites such reflection.

Allegro

Tymieniecka’s *Metaphysical Rhapsodies of Faith* overcome the natural attitude with its ciphering of life and death; she speaks from the place where life and death unite. *Christo-Logos* is, in fact, an esoteric book. It is esoteric in the sense that it points to a possibility of an immortal “substance” (for the lack of a better term) that is primeval both to the human condition and to a larger life. It is a bridge to the totally invisible and, therefore, not given in appearances, that is to say, invisible but sustaining all appearances.¹⁴ Neither measurable nor immeasurable, not the body and not its perceived flesh, it is, in the essence of things, “sovereign and conditioned at the same time” (see Ibn ‘Arabi 1975, 34).

Tymieniecka says, “We have discovered the light within ourselves, each coming upon his innumerable experiences yielding evidence of the eternal precept revealed to the mankind and so opening our opaque, enfolded being to the Absolute”¹⁵ (Tymieniecka 2012a, 194). This light, this experience, which is so strictly subjective that it cannot possibly be shared, is known via spontaneity in the transcendental-existential turn of Phenomenology toward Philosophy of Life. In other contexts, it is sentience. *Allegro*, the First Movement of my symphony, is a cadence of sen-

tience. Not at all intentionality, a structural relation in itself, sentience is embedded in *all* of meaning and *hyle*. In analytic philosophy, a kindred concept is the famous “what it’s like,” the qualia. In the debate over cognitive phenomenology, one asks¹⁶ is there a quale to thought? In accordance with Tymieniecka’s Philosophy of Life, we should ask: are there qualia to sentience? Or, is sentience at the core of any and all qualia, at the unshareable, intimate dimension of subjectivity? If so, does this essence of qualia-ness go away in the moment of death, when all intentional relations seem to collapse together with sensory data and biologically dependent intentionalities? Are we, then, something or nothing?

Moderato

A specific contour of our symphonic theme is beginning to emerge. In the Second Movement, *Moderato*, I will follow the Tymienieckian thread of sentience in the labyrinth of animate and inanimate nature. Sentience is an ontological platform for phenomenality; it is also an essence of all qualia, which is to say, the quale animating every qualia. That established, we will now adjust the horizon of inquiry. We proceeded from the spontaneity within the existential horizon to its ontological ground, sentience; we moved from the sheen to living silver itself. We will now glean from sentience not from the standpoint of the human condition but, rather, in its cosmic status. If the Descartes-Vico polarity of possible knowledge shifts between subject and object, the pirouette of our intuition would be in a direction away from either, from the ek-static outside of life in appearances into its inside – basically, into the substance of the appearances of the world.

Tymieniecka’s idea of The New Enlightenment is that it brings with it a revolution in scientific thinking. Science is no longer concerned exclusively with the factic properties of objects but with new ontologies, such as that of complexity theory. To me complexity theory reads as a mathematical expression of the Phenomenology of Life; its phase shifts and strange attractors are remarkably reminiscent of the ontopoietic novum in Tymieniecka’s vision. In cognitive theory, it has been proposed many times that what subjectively comes across as qualia of thought is, in essence, a set of informational relationships pertaining to cognition or, rather, information *per se* that is subjectivistically appropriated in the human experience of thought.¹⁷ Information transcends subject-object relations; subject-object relations themselves can be viewed as informational relations. We have no evidence that information pertains only to the physical universe; on the contrary, we have evidence from quantum mechanics and mathematics that things are quite the opposite: observer and physical universe are there mutually engaged, as in, for example, the [Belavkin](#) equation or Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle. Further, life and death are intermingled (cf. Schrödinger’s mental experiment with a cat and *Verschränken* (entanglement), when a cat can be both alive and dead). Information can be thought of as being a substratum on the sides of subject and object each, in *noema* and *noesis*, in both the conscious self and the material, non-conscious, and philosophically non-existent

world. In the history of thought, a similar view was developed by the Islamic philosopher Suhrawardī in his argument concerning the identity of subjective awareness and objective visible light; this substance just appears to be of different kinds in the subject-object differentiation.¹⁸ Consequently, if we zoom intuition into sentience in the spectacle of experience and focus exclusively on the qualia of pure subjectivity, what we experience is not just something monadic and purely qualia-tative, or even analyzable in structural terms, but also what self-subsistently is, and is self-subsistently alive.

Minuet

The dance of nonlinear complexity unfolds in the Third Movement, *Minuet*, in which the informational patterns of consciousness, cosmos, and life must be recognized as the arabesques of sentience. In this dance, sentience is not a source or primeval ground into which we can tap or to which we can return but is, rather, as the phenomenological substance of all appearances, the very there-ness and facticity of all things. The lived existential property of spontaneity springs forth from sentience. – this can be discovered in an introspective experiment with a movement of the mind towards the pure subjectivity. The selfsame sentience unfolds as complex relationships in the primeval waves of information that compile our universe. In its downward arc, these sentient informational patterns are given to us as the appearances of life and the spontaneity of sentience – as the creativity of the human subject. These patterns manifest themselves in upward and downward arcs of life, and, therefore, as a minuet.

Finale Glorioso

So far, we submitted that sentience is not a property of the human brain and not even an emerging property of life. Rather, it is borrowed from the cosmos and appropriated as the self in the human condition; inter-subjectivity is a derivative of sentience whereby subjectivity is an instance of inter-subjectivity. Since sentience brings with it the intuition of life (which is, according to our imagination, a non-intentional kind of knowledge), this intuition must extend into dying and has no reason not to continue beyond. Now, in the Fourth Movement, *Finale Glorioso*, I will describe the patterns of sentience in the soul's final ascent, and honor the intuitional gifts that proceed from the passage of a great soul.

Having established the under-cover identity of the qualia of sentience, which is neither subjective nor objective, neither a wave nor a field, neither a particle nor idea but, rather, informational relations with the patterns of self-organizing complexity, we may now again engage in the upward arc and inquire: can the sentient substratum of the universe ever cease to be? Can the informational relationship ever be extinguished? What happens in the seclusion of a Buddhist burial chamber which, opened later, reveals the flesh and bones of a saint gone with only nails and hair

remaining? Is transfiguration a metaphor or a description and, if so, a metaphor for what or a description of what?

I wish to shift now to more personal imaginings. Those who have witnessed death will perhaps agree with me that it has a certain emptying quality in it. Not only is a person is gone, and the body goes breathless and still, but, in addition, the space around changes its metrics. A strange blazing physicality of emptiness emerges, like a gap or rip in tactility. This gap seems to bridge the worlds: traditions claim that the deceased ones can, for a while, hear our prayers and even receive guidance for their transitions. In my witnessing a few deaths recently, the gap did not seem to be as present as before. Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi departed in stillness; Professor Eugene Taylor departed in sorrow; Professor Arthur Hastings, a very saintly man, departed in glory, and when his students mentally asked for guidance in the wake of his departure, they felt that the guidance was given. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka departed in glory. She appeared welcomed by a celestial chorus from the ranks of angels. She ascended into light. The echo of this departure lasted for many days. Like a child in a mother's embrace, she turned to the bosom of Life which she faithfully serenaded for so many decades. There was never any gap.

Imagination is a cognitive organ. It reaches beyond the circumference of the senses. It metaphorizes the invisible. These images of glorious departure of the soul, the absence of the gap in life – are they not the arabesques of sentience? They herald an increase of sentience, the increase of the fullness of the Logos, the increase of life. Isn't this spontaneity pushing the limits of the mind toward further and further frontiers of knowledge in The New Enlightenment? And, doesn't it give us hope that perhaps even 2000 years after the nascent self-disclosure of Christo-Logos, the universe is still not a completed creation, and we still have a road to travel together in expanding horizons of knowledge, through the mirrors of sentience? As the Philosopher's lyrical alter ego, Timothy the Dispossessed, says, "We advance in the fulfillment of our spirit" (Tymieniecka 2012a, 16).

For those of us who share the human condition, the gift of her departure is to see beyond our limitations, to align the spontaneity of sentience with our expressions, as did she, and to spread the word. Anna-Teresa's visionary insight will animate clinical theory and the work of the healing professions; it will extend into physics and astronomy; it will penetrate into computer science, artificial intelligence, and the building of the new virtual realities. The cup of sentience is full, and the fullness of it is increasing. We need to keep spreading the word.

The coda follows. May the gifts of spontaneity increase; may new mental horizons open; may new angles of intuition follow the self-revelations of sentience. If phenomenology were only a bodily enterprise, an outcropping of corporeity (as is awareness), or a product of *praxis*, the end of the body would be the end of any phenomenology. But, in the melody of sentient cosmic information, phenomenology is a quintessential, primeval self-reflection of sentience, ciphered, as it were, in the symbols of language. Phenomenology is conceivable as a part of the universe, a pathway in the substratum of the cosmos. Direct intuition appercepts not just the unity of things but, rather, the material from which all is made. This ever-lasting sentience can be what Husserl saw on his death bed when he was phenomenologiz-

ing his own dying, and exclaimed: “I see something beautiful... Write, write!”¹⁹ This is what shines at us from the final passage of Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, as her last book prepares intuition for the final philosophical turn.

Notes

1. For more on the experience of the sacred, see Dadosky 2004, *The Structure*.
2. Consensus trance is a term coined by American psychologist Charles Tart for the ordinary state of consciousness in which people follow the natural attitude assumptions of what is real and behave in a stimulus-response mode, without reflection. For more on consensus trance, see Tart 1986, *Waking Up*. For more on the experiences of the sacred which show as if through ruptures in the regular phenomenal field, see Louchakova, “Ontopoiesis.” Note that Louchakova and Louchakova-Schwartz are one and the same author.
3. For Tymieniecka’s comments on knowledge, see Louchakova-Schwartz 2012a, “Self.”
4. For more on intuition of life in Tymieniecka’s writings, see Louchakova-Schwartz, “DirectIntuition.”
5. The term the “self-revelation of life” is borrowed from Karl Hefty’s 2015 English translation of Michel Henry’s *Incarnation*.
6. For the original oldest version of the legend of Savitri, see Vyasa’s *Mahabharatam* 2008.
7. For the Katha Upanishad, see Sarvananda 1921, *Katha-upanishad*.
8. For more on philosophy as a way of life, see Hadot 2013, *Philosophy*.
9. For more on the primary meanings in Vedānta, see Berliner, *Advaita Makaranda*.
10. For more on Tymieniecka’s concept of the New Enlightenment, see Louchakova-Schwartz 2012a, 2014a, b, “A Paradox.”
11. A theory of non-intentional knowledge was developed in Vedānta. See Shankarāchārya 1993, *Aparokshānubhūti*. For the present author’s non-intentional theory of knowledge in Phenomenology of Life, *(T)ex(t)perience*.
12. When I wrote this, I was not yet familiar with the work of Michel Henry. Henry’s work, such his *Incarnation*, confirms this insight.
13. For the reflections on essential substance, see Henry 2015, *Incarnation*. Also, Louchakova-Schwartz 2012b, “Intuition” and 2014a, “Dia-Log(os).”
14. When I wrote this, I was not yet familiar with the work of Michel Henry. Henry’s work, such his *Incarnation*, confirms this insight.
15. Here, “opaque flesh” means *hyle*, the perceptual flesh; this is analogous to Henry’s sensed body, as opposed to sensible body, i.e., the *ek-stasis* of life as opposed to its self-revelation (cf. the Tymienieckian Absolute).
16. For more on qualia, see Bayne and Montague 2011, *Cognitive Phenomenology*; also Kriegel 2015, *The Varieties*.

17. For more on informational relations underlying qualia in subjective experience, see the concluding section in Louchakova-Schwartz 2016, “Theophanis” and Oizumi et al. 2014, “From the Phenomenology.”
18. For an exposition of Suhrawardī’s argument of the unity of awareness and light, see Louchakova-Schwartz 2015, “A Phenomenological Approach.”
19. See Schmitz-Perrin 1996, “La phénoménologie” and the exposition of that article in Louchakova 2005, “Ontopoiesis and Union.”

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