

The Dialectical Dynamic of Life's Self-Preservation in Hans Jonas' Philosophical Biology

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1. Introduction

Hans Jonas' reflections on ethics exhibit the philosopher's advocacy of conservation, especially of the natural and living environment. It is indeed undeniable that the author of *The Imperative of Responsibility* reminds us of the importance of the "core phenomenon of our humanity, which is to be preserved in its integrity at all costs," and that the care for the future of humankind "must obviously include care for the future of all nature on this planet as a necessary condition of man's own."¹ The principal aim of this article is to underline that, according to Jonas, the accomplishment of these tasks entails preserving and keeping a particular "quality" of terrestrial life, related to its teleological dynamism and the possibility of its future development. Indeed, Jonas refuses to countenance what he considers the deterioration or loss of life's higher potential.

Understanding the full meaning of this statement entails taking a closer look at Jonas' overall inquiry into life. We shall therefore try to present a comprehensive interpretation of Jonas' "philosophical biology."² In particular, our aim is to show that his philosophical account of life pivots on the dialectical dynamic of self-preservation, which entails both self-maintenance and self-alteration. According to Jonas, this twofoldness is at the core of life's *teleological* dynamics of transcendence beyond a given state of things. At the human level, the dialectics of life gains ethical relevance and is expressed through the dynamic relationship between *Dasein* ("existence") and *Sosein* ("condition") (IR 40).³

To achieve these goals, we will do the following: First, we aim to demonstrate—while foregoing an extensive analysis of the topic—the

relevance of the notions of *Dasein* and *Sosein* to Jonas' anthropological and ethical reflections (§2). Secondly, we will inquire into the elaborate relationship between Jonas' anthropology and his philosophical biology to lay out, on the one hand, the extent to which the dialectics of self-preservation applies to life as such and, on the other hand, how human beings rely on the duality that characterizes the phenomenon of life (§3). Finally, we will return to anthropology in order to further specify what makes human beings different from other forms of organic life (§4).

2. The Duty to Preserve Human *Dasein* and *Sosein*

Among critical appraisals of Jonas' thinking, one of the most insightful was published in 1991 by Paul Ricoeur under the title "La responsabilité et la fragilité de la vie: Éthique et philosophie de la biologie chez Hans Jonas."⁴ Toward the end of his article, Ricoeur expresses a doubt regarding Jonas' proposal: "[the] philosophy of biology cannot provide a *sufficient* foundation" for ethics (EPJ 216). Ricoeur remarks that the ethical duty to defend "the future existence of humanity as a precondition for the proper exercise of responsibility" ought not be concerned with its biological survival alone but also with "the authentically human aspect of the life that has to be protected" (ibid.). He concludes: "Indeed, what the new imperative demands is not only that human beings should exist after us but precisely that these are humans in accordance with the very idea of humankind" (EPJ 216–7). In other words, according to Ricoeur, the sole contribution of philosophy of biology to ethics is that it shows that life is interested in its own self-continuation. Other ethically relevant and specifically human features, however, such as striving for the good, the advancement of human dignity, and the quest for responsibility require more than just a philosophical-biological foundation since they ultimately revolve around a different kind of claim.⁵

What we would like to discuss here is not whether the philosophy of biology is sufficient to ground ethics (this would surely exceed the scope of our article) but whether the achievement of Jonas' inquiry into the meaning of life and its ethical relevance is restricted to pointing out that life is to be understood merely in terms of homeostatic self-preservation. We argue that this is not the case, since, as we shall see in the next section, according to Jonas, any form of organic life manifests more than a mere tendency to preserve itself unaltered and should be understood as an open dynamic of self-transcendence. However, before carrying out a critical and detailed interpretation of Jonas' philosophical-biological works, let us briefly recall how the topic of "self-preservation" applies to Jonas' ethics.

It is well known that *The Imperative of Responsibility* deals with threats related to present-day technological developments. Jonas enunciates the core thesis of his book at its very outset:

The irresistibly unbound Prometheus, supplied by science with unheard-of powers and by economics with an incessant impulse, calls for an ethics that, through self-restriction, prevents technological power's becoming a sorry fate for human beings. The persuasion that the promises of modern technology have turned into a threat, or that the latter has indissolubly joined those promises, is the opening thesis of this book. (PV 15; our trans.)⁶

Among the reasons for this threat, Jonas highlights the following circumstances:

Not counting the insanity of a sudden, suicidal atomic holocaust, which sane fear can avoid with relative ease, it is the slow, long-term, cumulative—the peaceful and constructive use of worldwide technological power, a use in which all of us collaborate as captive beneficiaries through rising production, consumption, and sheer population growth—that poses threats much harder to counter. (IR ix)

For Jonas, what is really threatening in technology today is that troublesome results arise precisely from its ordinary employment on a massive scale. This generates cumulative and irreversible effects on the environment and biosphere. Moreover, thanks to modern technology the human being has become an object of technology itself (IR 18–21).⁷ Technology has become the “calling” of humankind—that is, on the one hand, the employment of technology is unavoidable, while, on the other hand, it gives rise to crucial ethical issues (IR 9). Indeed, an undeniable fact has come to light:

The critical vulnerability of nature to man's technological intervention—unsuspected before it began to show itself in damage already done. This discovery . . . alters the very concept of ourselves as a causal agency in the larger scheme of things. It brings to light, through the effects, that the nature of human action has *de facto* changed, and that an object of an entirely new order—no less than the whole biosphere of the planet—has been added to what we must be responsible for because of our power over it. (IR 6–7)

What we wish to recall is that Jonas' ethical inquiry into responsibility and its new dimensions is based on the “purposiveness” of life and on the related “ontological axiom,” and culminates in the formulation of an *imperative*.⁸ This imperative entails two main *duties* whose relationship has not yet been fully analyzed in the secondary literature on Jonas. The first states that we have “a duty toward the *existence* [*Dasein*] of future mankind” (PV 91; our trans.),⁹ since “the possibility of there being responsibility in the world, which is bound to the existence of

men, is of all objects of responsibility the first" (IR 99). In addition, a *second duty* has to be fulfilled: the "duty toward their [i.e., the future humankind's] *condition* [*Sosein*], the quality of their life" (IR 40; PV 91).¹⁰ Human *Sosein* is twofold. On the one hand, it refers to humanity's *capacity* to accomplish its life in compliance with the "duty to be truly human" (IR 42). This is precisely what is currently at stake: Jonas writes that with "the alchemy of our 'utopian' technology," we could possibly rob future human beings of their capacity to be truly human (ibid.). On the other hand, *Sosein* refers to the qualitative aspects of human life related to well-being, happiness, etc. (ibid.). According to Jonas, however, the first aspect of *Sosein* has ethical priority over the second, since the latter pertains to "specified duties toward the well-being of future humans," which are derivative of "*our* cardinal duty toward the future of humanity as such" (IR 42).

This leaves us with the question of the nature of the relationship between the two duties of the imperative, and thus between *Dasein* and *Sosein*. The answer to this question is also twofold. It is clear that there is a priority of the first duty over the second, since humankind's duty to existence comes first and "this duty toward the *quality* of future life, provided it comes to it, stands itself under the condition of the aforementioned duty to ensure that there *be* future life and with it future subjects of possible rights" (IR 42). However, Jonas emphasizes that the imperative "*that there be a mankind*" (IR 43; PV 96) entails also an essential connection to the first aspect of *Sosein*, which concerns the preservation of the capacity of future mankind to fulfill the "duty to be truly human." In other words, the object of this basic imperative, and thus of responsibility, is not specific human beings but the ontological "*idea* of Man, which is such that it demands the presence of its embodiment in the world" (IR 43). This recalls Ricoeur's "very idea of humankind" (EPJ 217) as well as Hannah Arendt's "human condition."¹¹ So, according to Jonas, this ontological idea manifests an essential connection with *Dasein* and *Sosein*:

Only the idea of Man, by telling us *why* there should be men, tells us also *how* they should be. . . . The categorical imperative commands only *that* there be *human beings*, with the accent equally on the *that* [*Daß*] and the *what* [*Was*] of obligatory existence. (IR 43; PV 97)

Nevertheless, given the current technological threat and the fact that, according to Jonas, "the prophecy of doom is to be given greater heed than the prophecy of bliss" (IR 31), human deeds ought to be primarily inspired by a provisional "emergency ethics" that is based on the duty to preserve the future of mankind:

Born of danger, its first urging is necessarily an ethics of preservation and prevention, not of progress and perfection. . . . What now matters most is not to perpetuate or bring about a particular image of man, but

first of all to keep open the horizon of *possibilities* which in the case of man is given with the existence of the species as such and—as we must hope from the promise of the *imago Dei*—will always offer a new chance to the human essence. This means that the “No to Not-Being”—and first to that of man—is at this moment and for some time to come the primal mode in which an emergency ethics of the endangered future must translate into collective action the “Yes to Being” demanded of man by the totality of things. (IR 139–40)¹²

In terms of *Dasein* and *Sosein*, this means, given the current technological threat, that what is ethically imperative is not focusing on humankind's well-being and happiness (the second meaning of *Sosein*) but ensuring the existence of humankind's capacity to fulfill the duty to be truly human.¹³ As we shall see in §4, this entails restoring the dynamic meaning of the *Dasein-Sosein* relationship, including its teleological, eidetic, and reflective dimensions. This will thus involve a clarification as to why the ontological *idea* of human being entails preserving the possibility of further possibilities, rather than the sheer survival of a fixed essence, as some scholars argue.¹⁴ Moreover, the duty to ensure the future of humankind's *Dasein* and *Sosein* also implies the inclusion of the organic world as a whole within the domain of responsibility. Human beings share a “solidarity of interest” with the organic world since the latter represents a necessary condition of human life (IR 136).

Despite the seeming resemblance to a utilitarian perspective, which is convinced of the mutual, clear-cut separability of *Dasein* and *Sosein* and relies on a dualistic hierarchy between nature and human beings, Jonas' statements express something utterly different—namely the dynamic ontological relationship between nature and human beings, and between *Dasein* and *Sosein* (IR 137; PV 265–6). To understand this relationship and how human specificity relies on this ontological relationship, we first need to engage with Jonas' phenomenology of life. More specifically, in §3, we will explain how organic life already reveals a peculiar dynamic of self-preservation, which is endowed with ontological relevance. We shall then return in §4 to the question of human specificity with the aim of delineating the senses in which it is and is not continuous with the basic pattern and dynamic of organic life.

3. The Living Being's Dynamic of Self-Preservation

In line with his phenomenological background, Jonas knows that thoroughly understanding life requires a method of inquiry that is different from the dominant scientific and philosophical methods. Taking a methodological turn allows him to get to the essence of life. And that is precisely what Jonas aims for in dealing with the notion of “individuality” in an essay he programatically entitled “Biological Foundations of Individuality.”¹⁵

Jonas expresses dissatisfaction with the two traditional ways of understanding individuality: on the one hand, with what might be called the external perspective, which states that matter and, consequently, space and time, are to be regarded as the *principia individuationis*; and, on the other hand, with the view that focuses on the individual's own form or essence. He claims:

We are dissatisfied with both these traditional accounts of individuality In contradistinction I wish here to take a stand "within," asking what it is to *be* an individual—for the individual itself; and I shall try to expound a concept which makes individuality the prerogative of a specific mode of existence and therefore the peculiarity of beings endowed with that mode of existing. (BFI 186–7)

As a result, Jonas reformulates the definition of individuality as follows:

Only those entities are individuals whose being is their own doing (and thus, in a sense, their task): entities, in other words, that are delivered up to their being for their being, so that their being is committed to them, and they are committed to keeping up this being by ever renewed acts of it. Entities, therefore, which in their being are exposed to the alternative of not-being as potentially imminent, and achieve being in answer to this constant imminence; entities, therefore, that are temporal in their innermost nature, that have being only by everbecoming, with each moment posing a new issue in their history; whose identity over time is thus, not the inert one of a permanent *substratum*, but the self-created one of continuous performance; entities, finally, whose *difference* from the *other*, from the rest of things, is not adventitious and indifferent to them, but a dynamic attribute of their being, in that the tension of this difference is the very medium of each one's maintaining itself in its selfhood by standing off the other and communing with it at the same time. (BFI 187)

First of all, Jonas reframes the issue of individuality according to a methodology that highlights *individuation* as a continuous, dynamic, and, to some extent, paradoxical process—a process in which even the observer as such is involved. Then he delimits the boundaries of individuality by focusing on the *organic phenomenon*:

My contention will be that, on the evidence penetrable to us, the proposed conditions are exhibited by organisms and organisms only, but in some measure by *all* organisms: that they are integral to organic being as such; and that therefore the realm of individuality, in all its grades, is coextensive with the biological realm as a whole. The contention is, in brief, that individuality in any serious sense, and not the merely formal sense of numerical singularity, that is, individuality as a substantial quality, is an organic and only an organic phenomenon, and that for the organism it is an essential phenomenon. (Ibid.)

Hence Jonas' phenomenological analysis shifts to ontology as he seeks to answer this question: *What is the individuality of the living, that is, organic individual?* Any living being, he states in *The Phenomenon of Life*, is characterized by an *organic form*, which "stands in a dialectical relation of *needful freedom* to matter" (PL 80). This "basic situation of freedom" (PL 83) relies on two *dialectical* features: (a) The dependence and, at the same time, "a certain independence of [organic] form with respect to its own matter"; and (b) the organism's "emancipation from the type of fixed self-identity that is matter's, to give scope to a different, viz., mediate and functional, kind of identity" (PL 81). This kind of identity "from moment to moment reasserts itself, achieves itself, and defies the equalizing forces of physical sameness all around, is truly pitted against the rest of things" (PL 83). In "Biological Foundations of Individuality," Jonas explains further: "The exercise of the freedom which the living thing enjoys is rather a stern *necessity*. This necessity we call 'need,' which obtains only where existence is unassured and identity a continual task" (BFI 191).¹⁶ Why is this "needful freedom" endowed with ontological relevance? Exactly because it demonstrates what it means for a living organism to be an individual:

In short, the ontological individual requires, behind the continuity of form, *internal* identity as the subject of its existing *in actu*. Even "form" itself, i.e., the very structure dynamically securing its own preservation—and with it the whole fitness of organization to this effect, which formally is the vicious circle of a fitness to preserve fitness—must be deemed to be in the *service* of that self-related identity.

It is the aspect of "need" which gets us beyond the indifference of the mere form-matter relation. We said before that the "freedom" which the living, i.e., metabolizing, entity enjoys relative to matter is matched by the necessity to exercise that freedom. This necessity is its need, namely, the need for constant self-renewal, and thus need for the matter required in that renewal, and thus need for "world." (BFI 194–5; for "ontological individual," see also PL 79–80)

A first remark: the self-concern of the (organic) individual does not aim at maintaining itself unchanged. Quite the contrary: the organism achieves its identity through a continuous dynamic of renewal and change (metabolism). And secondly, the freedom of the individual needs the world to exist, persist, and renew itself.¹⁷ This means that the being and selfhood of the individual, "suspended in possibility, is to be actualized by the *use* of the world" (BFI 196). As a broader ontological result, the "basic situation of freedom" reveals "this polarity of self and world, of internal and external, complementing that of form and matter"—in a word, it is characterized by an oppositional and dialectical dynamic of individuation (PL 83).

This dialectic reveals a complementary, integral feature of organic life, namely its “self-transcendence,” thanks to which life’s “self-concern, active in the acquisition of new matter, is essential openness for the encounter of outer being” (PL 84) and thus “goes constantly *beyond* the given state of things. What, in its total effect, appears to be the maintaining of the given condition, is in fact achieved by way of a continuous moving beyond the given condition” (BFI 197). And indeed, according to Jonas, this “opening into an environment” and “having a world” carry the “promise of higher and more comprehensive stages” of life (PL 84).¹⁸ So what is envisaged here is Jonas’ persuasion that, thanks to self-transcendence, the organism’s striving for self-preservation somehow leads beyond itself by opening up to evolution, which ultimately culminates in the human being.¹⁹ As we will see in the following pages, Jonas reaches this conclusion by extending the organic dynamics of self-transcendence to the overall phenomenon of life.

To sum up, Jonas’ philosophy of life focuses on three inseparable notions, namely matter, form, and dynamism. Nevertheless, we will proceed by examining *form* and *dynamism* separately. This will help us to understand why, according to Jonas, the self-preservation of life basically evidences a twofold, dialectical feature and a continuous striving toward renewal and self-transcendence. Although form is certainly not static since it entails the coexistence of self-maintenance and self-alteration, for the purpose of analysis it will be examined merely in terms of its independence, autonomy, and identity. As such, organic form has the following characteristics: First, the individual’s organic form perseveres both over and above and via the metabolic turnover. The organic form expresses the organism’s own, to use Ricœur’s expression, “sameness-identity” (*identité-mêmeté*), which is achieved not in opposition to the metabolic exchange of matter but precisely because of that dynamism.²⁰ The objective, external aspect of this identity at the same time shows a subjective, internal dimension, which is endowed with self-interest and teleological relevance. Secondly, the organic form changes due to metabolism; any organic individual develops, grows, and ages, writes Jonas, in agreement with Aristotle’s notion of movement (PL 113).²¹ Thirdly, the organic form manifests a certain degree of transindividual immutability and persistence, since individuals that belong to the same species maintain the same organic form from one generation to the next. Fourthly, life shows evidence of a variable plurality of organic forms as an ontological result of the active “self-transcendence,” “inwardness,” intensive “time-horizon opening,” and “finalism” of organic freedom (PL 84–6). Because of these features, every organic individual has a somewhat “expressive” and communicative nature (PL 85, 99–107).²² According to Jonas, it is possible to give a more structured account of

this plurality by assuming that organic form, that is, “individuality itself is something that can be present in greater or smaller measure” and, thus, a “scale along which should be found different degrees of individuality” (BFI 204). This is not only plausible but necessary for understanding the complexity and variety of life (PL 2).²³

Let us now regard these meanings of organic form from the point of view of dynamism, which is key to Jonas’ overall account of life in terms of “freedom.” He argues, “already the primary level [of life], defined by metabolism as such, displays and offers to evolution for further elaboration” a certain number of attributes of the dynamics of freedom, which “belong to the essence of life” (PL 83). The dialectical aspect of this organic dynamic can be discerned in four moments.

In the first place, there is the dynamic thanks to which the individual preserves itself while constantly and actively rejecting *death*. On the basic level, the dialectical aspect of this dynamic

shows in the terms of metabolism itself: denoting, on the side of freedom, a capacity of organic form, namely to change its matter, metabolism denotes equally the irremissible necessity for it to do so. Its “can” is a “must,” since its execution is identical with its being. (PL 83)

In a word, life is the constant choice of itself, achieved through its own activity. Through this continual choice, life appreciates itself and disregards death. This is the first manifestation of purpose within being. Moreover, as we shall see, this metabolic dynamic is directly experienced by living beings as their task. Finally, this dynamic may be understood in terms of a movement of subjectification of the organic form in detaching itself from objectified matter.

The second moment concerns the dynamic of *self-transcendence*. To exist, the organic form “must have matter at its disposal, and it finds it outside itself, in the foreign ‘world’” (PL 84). As a result, “life is turned outward and toward the world in a peculiar relatedness of dependence and possibility . . . [Its] self-concern, active in the acquisition of new matter, is essential openness for the encounter of outer being,” which Jonas calls the “self-transcendence of life” (ibid.). In his philosophical interpretation of life, he emphasizes that the dynamic of self-transcendence always relies on metabolism (and “springs from the primary antinomy of freedom and necessity inherent in organism as such” [ibid.]), while at the same time showing that “freedom has taken possession of necessity and has overtaken it thanks to the possibility of having a world” (OF 163; PL omits these words). This fact carries the evolutive “promise of higher and more comprehensive stages” (PL 84). Or, expressed in more dialectical terms: “Dependence refers to the

domain of its possible realizations and thus establishes intentionality as a basic feature of all life" (OF 164; PL omits these words).

Thirdly, there is the dynamic of "inwardness or subjectivity," which is "involved in this transcendence, imbuing all the encounters occasioned in its horizon with the quality of felt selfhood, however faint its voice" (ibid.). In this sense, the self-concern and self-centeredness of the organism "at the same time [bridge] the qualitative gulf to the rest of things by selective modes of *relation*," and this "restates in part what was said before about the self-transcendence of life" (ibid.). But there is an additional dialectical feature to be considered, namely the fact that "the open horizon means affectivity as well as spontaneity, outward exposure as well as outward reach: only by being sensitive can life be active" (PL 84–5). Most relevantly for our purposes, Jonas reaches the following conclusion, which clarifies another aspect of life's teleological nature:

The primary solicitation of transcendence indeed issues from the organic want and is thus one with the commitment to activity: it is outgoing; but receptivity of sense for the incoming, this passive side of the same transcendence, enables life to be selective and "informed" instead of a blind dynamism. (PL 85)

Thus, the inwardness or subjectivity of life is at the origin of the fact that life is to be understood in terms of a dialectical dynamics of subjectification and objectification. On the one hand, it is due to "the isolation of the organic self" that "internal identity becomes the subject-pole of a communication with things" (ibid.), that is, with objective reality; on the other hand, subjectivity is always correlated with an objective body as its very condition.

Finally, the *temporal* dynamics of life adds an important dimension to the previous reflections on life's transcendence, want, and relational horizon. Jonas states:

Self-concern, actuated by want, throws open as well a horizon of time that embraces, not outer presence, but inner imminence: the imminence of that future into which organic continuity is each moment about to extend by the satisfaction of that moment's want. Thus life is facing forward as well as outward and extends "beyond" its own immediacy in both directions at once. (Ibid.)

So, in addition to the previous dynamic features, organic life also involves a dialectic related to time, which involves the dimensions of past and future. This takes place both on the individual level (the single organism) and on the collective level (every species and the relationship between species). What kind of relationship does Jonas envisage between the two? Given the self-transcendence of life, Jonas believes that "the anticipation [of] imminent future in appetite is more fundamental

than the retention of past in memory" (PL 86). He explains:

For absorption of the past into each emerging present, that is, "historicity" as such, even of the briefest span, is the prerequisite of duration. But future is the dominant time-horizon opening before the thrust of life, if *concern* is its primary principle of inwardness. (Ibid.)

This openness characterizes not only metabolism and temporal exchanges of matter but also the organic form.

What do the above-mentioned dynamics have in common? First, each dynamic relies on a certain degree of dependence involving conjunctions of polar opposite concepts (organic form in relation to matter, the beyond in relation to here, self in relation to world, subjectivity in relation to objectivity, future in relation to past). Yet, due to the dialectical feature of those relationships, in each conjunction, a pole appears that is somehow endowed with an *ontological primacy* (i.e., organic form, transcendence, self, subjectivity, future—aspects yielding "the ontological concept of an individual as against a merely phenomenological one" [PL 79]) and as a result may be regarded as a particular facet of Jonas' dialectical account of life. This ontological or dynamic primacy²⁴ cannot be understood as a sheer result of dependence, nor can its meaning be simply reduced to dependence, even though its existence certainly relies on it (PL 80). Indeed, Jonas' concluding remarks on the teleology of life appear to be consistent with this dynamic portrayal. He states:

This is the root of the teleological or finalistic nature of life: finalism is in the first place a dynamic character of a certain mode of existence, coincident with the freedom and identity of form in relation to matter, and only in the second place a fact of structure or physical organization, as exemplified in the relation of organic parts to the whole and in the functional fitness of organism generally. (PL 86)

The issue we would like to tackle now is the following: How do these dynamic and dialectical attributes related to the primary level of life, defined by metabolism, characterize the more complex levels of life? In what sense does the evolution of life fulfill the above-mentioned "promise of higher and more comprehensive stages" (PL 84) envisaged by the basic dynamic attributes of life? To answer these questions, we will outline three aspects of the dynamic of life for Jonas.

The first aspect concerns the evolutionary dynamics of life. On the one hand, different species share the same basic dynamic of life, while, on the other hand, they are characterized by a thorough discontinuity. So, in addition to the basic discontinuity of the organic individual as regards inorganic matter—"To be an individual means not-to-be-integrated with the world" (BFI 204)—life manifests a discontinuity of a different kind within its own domain because individuality is a matter of degree (ibid.). The discontinuity within organic life relies on dissimilarities in *mediacy*

and *distance* (BFI 204). These notions express a dialectical dynamic due to which life is free from matter (i.e., organic life entails a certain distance from matter), while at the same time paradoxically depending on it and in need of bridging the gap between self and world, that is, “between subject and object” (ibid.), to survive. Jonas holds that the disparate degrees of individuality rely on the specific means of survival developed by organic individuals to exist and cope with the dialectic of mediacy and distance. For instance, as regards animal life, Jonas states that:

The spatial gap between subject and object, which is provisionally spanned by perception, is at the same time the temporary gap between need and satisfaction that is provisionally spanned by emotion (desire) and practically overcome by motion. All three modes [perception, emotion, and motion] express the mediacy of animal being, or the split between self and world—a qualitative widening of the split which metabolism opened first, and which is thus at the root of life. The lesser integration of the animal into its environment as compared to the plant, of which these modes of mediacy bear witness, is a measure of its greater individuality. (Ibid.)

However, the point is that the evolutionary plurality of means of survival that life develops are but another essential feature of life’s own essence:

Because of the metabolizing mode of this identity, need is of its very essence and it is thus with it from the beginning. But the very *means* evolved to serve this need, such as perception, locomotion, desire, add new kinds of need to the basic, metabolic one—and therewith new kinds of satisfaction. This dialectic too is of the essence of life. (BFI 196; see also PL 90–1, 106)

As a result, Jonas reasserts, life is more than the willingness to persist unchanged, since it has an evolutionary tendency that involves a dialectic. This dialectic is an essential feature of life that subjects it to qualitative changes over time and differentiates between the various levels of organic existence:

Not duration as such, but “duration of what?” is the question. This is to say that such “means” of survival as perception and emotion are never to be judged as means merely, but also as qualities of the life to be preserved and therefore as aspects of the end. It is one of the paradoxes of life that it employs means which modify the end and themselves become part of it. (PL 106)²⁵

“Freedom” and correlated “desire” are the concepts that Jonas employs to clarify this evolutionary dialectic, which also, as we shall see shortly, characterizes—albeit with a radical discontinuity—human beings. This dialectic ultimately leads to a broad, conjectural, metaphysical speculation concerning “cosmogonic eros” and its relationship with God and creation (OF 159–60).²⁶

The second aspect of the dynamic of life is the dynamic of individual development. Indeed, among the “developments of the element of ‘transcendence’ . . . which is inherent in metabolizing existence,” are those related to “*animal* evolution as distinct from plant life” (PL 100). Here, the basic continuity of life (relying on spatio-temporal “transcendence”) is complemented by a discontinuity stemming, on the one hand, from the freedom of the animal “to move about, and, to perceive at a distance” (ibid.), and, on the other hand, from a power developed by animal life, namely “emotion.” Emotion is related to “appetition” (PL 101), which refers to the dynamic that keeps the living individual alive and assures its “selfhood” (PL 107).²⁷ As it happens, selfhood is a dynamic feature, since every living organism grows and changes over time but remains the same individual. This is of course true for any living organism. However, only more complex forms of life endowed with the freedom to move, perceive at a distance, and feel develop the “appetitive” (and ultimately “desiderative”) dynamic of selfhood inherent in metabolizing existence to its full extent.

The third aspect of the dynamic of life concerns the dynamic of individual centralization. This dynamic can be somehow understood as a corollary to the first aspect, the evolutionary dynamics of life. Let us recall that life employs means of survival, “which modify the end and themselves become part of it” (PL 106). In fact, Jonas thinks that life presents an evolutionary trend toward higher degrees of individualization, which support the tendency of organic unity to prevail over the multiplicity of its bodily parts. This unity, however, is essentially dynamic and dialectically dependent on its relationship to matter: “Unity here is self-unifying, by means of changing multiplicity” (PL 79).²⁸

4. The Human Condition

Let us now examine the extent to which our earlier reflections on the dynamic and dialectical nature of life are relevant to the human being, who “remains part of the organic” (PL 1) while at the same time manifesting a tendency to utterly surpass nature.²⁹ The aim of clarifying the relationship between the human being and life is indeed crucial to Jonas’ thinking, and is so for at least two reasons. The first is that modern western philosophy generally provides two unsatisfying, albeit opposing, answers, namely dualism (i.e., a human being is not an integral part of nature, since her specificity—“the *human* soul”—is ultimately incommensurable with anything in nature), and (postdualistic) monism (i.e., human specificity is ultimately reducible to something biological) (PL 13–5).³⁰ The second reason is that Jonas seeks to provide an ontological foundation of his ethics, challenging the modern “is-ought” separation (IR x).³¹ Through a

discussion of Jonas' account of human specificity, we aim to point out the continuity, as well as the discontinuity, between the human being and life.

According to Jonas, human specificity in contradistinction to other living beings resides in a "more-than-animal" and "symbolical" feature (PL 158). Indeed, the human being "is one that indulges in the making of useless objects, or has ends in addition to the biological ones, or can serve the latter in ways remote from the direct usefulness of instrumental things" (ibid.). Jonas is, of course, aware that the possibility of distance-taking from the biological level must, to a certain degree, "be credited even to some higher animals" (PL 170).³² However, he is also convinced of the existence of a "metaphysical gap" between human beings and other forms of life (PL 175). How does Jonas argue his position, according to which the human being is both an integral part of nature and surpasses it? The dynamic or dialectical duality related to life's self-preservation proves useful once again.

On the side of continuity, the human being belongs to the very evolutionary process of "enhancement of that selfhood with which 'organism' originally dared indifferent nature" (PL 107). This might be a moment to recall the previously analyzed facets of the dialectic of life, which also apply to human beings: self-transcendence, self-world and subject-object split, means of survival and mediacy to bridge the split, etc. Jonas insists, in particular, on "inwardness or subjectivity" as a dialectical process of subjectification and objectification. Indeed, this dynamic appears to be a relevant aspect of the organic-animal-human continuity, while at the same time providing—as we shall see—an analytical hint of the discontinuity that human beings present:

The rift between subject and object, which long-range perception and motility opened and which the keenness of appetite and fear, of satisfaction and disappointment, of pleasure and pain, reflect, was never to be closed again. But in its widening expanse the freedom of life found room for all those modes of relation—perceptive, active, and emotional—which in spanning the rift justify it and by indirection redeem the lost unity. (PL 107)

Indeed, Jonas emphasizes humanity's peculiarity and discontinuity in applying this basic dynamic blueprint to humankind. In this regard, Jonas focuses on two specifically human features: (a) the "image faculty" of human beings as a "further degree of mediacy" (PL 184–5) that distinguishes humans from animals; and (b) a "threshold to a further mediation," which is achieved by *reflection* (PL 185). Both the image faculty and reflection are understood through the lens of the individuation process.³³ First, Jonas argues the following about the image faculty:

This new degree lies in the ideative extension of *perception*
The new mediacy consists in the interposition of the abstracted and

mentally manipulable *eidos* between sense and actual object, just as on the level of animal mediacy the perception of objects was interposed between the organism and its primary environment-relation. Imaging and speaking man ceases to see things directly: he sees them through the screen of representations of which he has become possessed by his own previous dealings with objects Their greatest role, however, lies in between experiences, when the actual object is not present for direct perception: then the abstracted images that are at the command of the subject provide in themselves the material for an "experience" at a remove—symbolic experience, *in which the world is taken hold of without imposing its presence*. (PL 184–5; emphasis added)

However, "true man"—i.e., the human peculiarity—only appears to its full extent because of the relationship between "image faculty" and reflection (PL 185).³⁴ This relationship generates a radical turn in the dynamics of subjectification (or individuation) and objectification that characterize life as such:

The fateful freedom of objectification, which confronts the self with the potential sum total of the "other," the "world," as an indefinite realm for possible understanding and action, can and eventually must turn back, with its burden of mediacy, upon the subject itself and make *it* in turn the object of a relation which again takes the detour via the *eidos*. The "form" here involved is different in kind from those of the whole realm of outwardness, for it concerns the self's *relation* to all outwardness. The new dimension of *reflection* unfolds, where the *subject* of all objectification appears *as such* to itself and becomes objectified for a new and ever more self-mediating kind of relation. With the first asking of the question, What is man's, what is my place and part in the scheme of things?, the self becomes engulfed in the distantness in which all things are kept by man and from which they have to be retrieved in acts of eidetic intentionality. (PL 185)

In this regard, the human being is characterized by an aptitude for "confrontation of oneself with oneself"—"*Quaestio mihi factus sum*, 'a question have I become unto me,'" says Jonas citing Augustine—and for inquiring into the overall meaning of being (PL 187).³⁵ On the side of continuity, the human peculiarity is clarified by means of the dialectical dynamic of individuation. However, it also manifests an unprecedented novelty: self-reflection, due to which the basic duality of life turns into ambivalence and ambiguity. On the one hand, in a human being the "vital concern of feeling which is at the bottom of life's venture and toil, and which is always for the enjoyment of selfness in the meeting with otherness, has here by a daring detour found its true and, in a way, original object" (PL 186). On the other hand, "as in all achievements of life, the price is high," which means that the higher degree of freedom entails an exponential, qualitative increase in the twofoldness of his or

her own existence (PL 186).³⁶ Jonas writes that this results in a radical surpassing of any other living form's mode of being:

As human satisfaction is different from animal and far surpassing its scope, so is human suffering, though man also shares in the animal range of feelings. But only man can be happy or unhappy, thanks to the measuring of his being against terms that transcend the immediate situation. Supremely concerned with what he is, how he lives, what he makes out of himself, and viewing himself from the distance of his wishes, aspirations, and approvals, man and man alone is open to despair. The German word *Verzweiflung* somehow renders the connection of despair with the twofoldness, the division of the self, that has come about with the transfer of the subject-object split to the realm of the subject itself, making it the quivering product of ever-mediating relation instead of an immediate possession. Suicide, this unique privilege of man, shows the ultimate manner in which man can become the object of himself. (PL 186–7)

In other words, as soon as it appears in the evolution of life, the freedom for self-reflection essentially reveals two possibilities: it can succeed in achieving an ever-mediated relation with itself, or it can fail to fulfill its *ratio essendi*, for instance by turning against its own existence. Jonas refers to this twofoldness with the expression “giddiness of freedom” (*Schwindel der Freiheit*) (OF 323; PL omits this expression).³⁷ Why “giddiness”? Because, when human freedom experiences its distance from the world, instead of attempting to bridge the gap, and thus fulfilling the dialectic of subjectification and objectification on which it relies, it tends to become “absolute” and fails.³⁸ To be entangled in its structural, dynamic ambivalence is the fate of human freedom and an unsurpassable characteristic of human existence—an essential feature that can by no means be discarded.

Here, it is important to keep in mind that the inherent ambivalence of human self-reflection is a result of the very process of subjectification and objectification that characterizes life as such.³⁹ A second remark is that the reflective aspect of human will runs like a *fil rouge* through Jonas' thinking, since it manifests a real turning point—endowed with the possibility of perversion—in a unilateral dynamics of self-transcendence. According to Christian terminology, which thoroughly characterizes western thinking, this core feature is defined as the corruptibility of the will—i.e., the existential condition according to which the self-reflective will experiences self-deception and thus discovers its own ambiguity, namely its capability to pursue either good or evil.⁴⁰

Let us now return to the notion of “image” and focus on its relevance to the specifically human dynamic that combines eidetic and reflective freedom. According to Jonas, the evolutionary emergence of “genuine humans” (see

IR 11, 200) relies on the “image of man” as the distinctive feature of the human form of life:

True man emerges when the painter of the bull and even of its hunter turns to concerning himself with the unpaintable image of his own conduct and the state of his self. Over the distance of this wondering, searching, and comparing perception there is constituted the new entity, “I.” This is of all the greatest venture in mediacy and objectification. We use the term “image” deliberately. Man models, experiences, and judges his own inner state and outward conduct after the image of what is man’s. Willingly or not he lives the idea of man—in agreement or in conflict, in acceptance or in defiance, in compliance or in repudiation, with good or with bad conscience. The image of man never leaves him, however much he may wish at times to revert to the bliss of animality. (PL 185–6)⁴¹

What needs to be stressed here is the duality that images share with all the aforementioned features of life: both the individual and the public image of a human being are subjected to change over time while there is also something that does not change (PL 186). This duality may be clarified by analyzing the image either in terms of *form* or of *dynamism*. In terms of the first, the image shows certain properties (PL 159–65) that reveal the image’s “ontological difference” (PL 165) from other objects. Of course, according to Jonas, images must be regarded as the causal product of intentionality (there has to be someone who materially made the image). However, it is also true that images, apprehended as images, tend to neutralize their dynamic and dialectical relationship of dependence and transcendence to matter:

A picture, apprehended as picture, is a sign not of the painter’s motions but of the object depicted. In the image, the causal nexus is cut. Free to depict any causal situation, including that of painting a picture, the image does not represent the causality of its own becoming. (PL 164)

For this very reason, in the ordinarily prevailing analytical terms of form, the image is uniquely considered in its transcendence to matter and thus appears as a fixed, unchangeable entity. However, as already stated regarding organism, Jonas insists on the fact that the image should also be analyzed from another point of view, namely *dynamism*. In this regard, the image shows the same dynamic dialectic that characterizes life as such: on the one hand, the image relies on a relationship with the world; on the other, it manifests a tendency to transcend matter, which results in actually achieving an ontologically different level of reality. And it is of paramount importance to recall that these poles cannot be properly understood unless they are considered in their mutual and dynamic relationship.

That is on the side of similarity. On the side of difference, we have to underline that the dialectic of life only reaches its greatest qualitative fulfillment with the human being. However, this achievement is one that is vulnerable to distortion, as demonstrated by the twofold meaning of the “giddiness of freedom.” It is our conviction that, in addition to the above-mentioned problem of the corruptibility of will, Jonas interprets the more recent ecological and biotechnological threats in these same terms. Indeed, the possibility of technologically enhanced human freedom turning against itself and committing ecological or biotechnological suicide has become concrete. Enabled by the employment of technology, human beings seem willing to overcome this twofoldness as follows: the utter objectification of life and human *Dasein* (genetic manipulation, as Jonas points out, is one of the most telling examples) (IR 21), which results in the complete dynamization of nature, life, and ultimately human *Sosein*, depriving them of any meaningful stability, completeness, or form.⁴² And the deprivation of this meaningfulness results in a further degree of objectification of life.

The fact is that, according to Jonas, what characterizes not only human beings but life as such is precisely the mutual, twofold dialectical dynamic of subjectification *and* objectification, self-maintenance *and* self-alteration, etc. However, only human beings have achieved awareness of this twofoldness in terms of *Dasein* and *Sosein*, which occurred through reflection and the immense power they have acquired because of their “eidetic control” of imagination and motility (PL 172). It is here that human specificity achieves ethical relevance (PL 175): since what threatens the twofoldness of life is the current employment of technology, it is precisely the duty of human beings to set responsibility against indiscriminate freedom to preserve this feature of life.

But *why* should human beings aim at preserving the existence and integrity of nature, after all? As we hinted in §2, Jonas’ answer relies on the “ontological axiom,” according to which the *purposiveness* of life is a “good-in-itself, of which we grasp with intuitive certainty that it is infinitely superior to any purposelessness of being” (IR 80). In purposiveness as such, “we can see a fundamental self-affirmation of being, which posits it *absolutely* as the better over against nonbeing” (IR 81). However, Jonas also says that the greatness of human freedom is endowed with “metaphysical” relevance (PL 175) because humans, through self-reflection, are capable of posing the “unanswerable” question of metaphysics: Why is there something rather than nothing (PL 279)? And he believes that in the current epoch the answer to this question cannot but be that “*there is no necessity of there being a world at all*” (ibid.).⁴³ Life is thus ultimately contingent, its plenitude incomplete, and its existence truly open-ended (PL x, 275).⁴⁴ At the same time, the

dynamic and transcendent purposiveness of life does show evidence of a certain plenitude already achieved through form and value, as well as a desire or tendency toward further fulfillment, accomplishment, and magnificence. Human beings are part of this dialectic and have the unique freedom to choose whether they want to participate in it (by ensuring its future) or hinder it. With the appearance of human freedom, the dialectic of life has not only achieved self-reflection but also the possibility of being doomed. Jonas considers this extreme degree of twofoldness as evidence of the special, that is, metaphysical, status of humans. Indeed, despite its contingency, what actively urges us to *preserve* the world is the “heritage of a past evolution . . . which heritage cannot be all bad in our case, if only because it has bequeathed to its present incumbents the (self-proclaimed) capacity to be judges of what is good and what is bad” (IR 32).⁴⁵ So, what “is to be preserved in its integrity at all costs” is “this core phenomenon of our humanity” (IR 34), whose true essence is the dynamic relationship between *Dasein* and *Sosein*, revealed by the ontological “*idea* of Man.”⁴⁶

5. Conclusions

In this article, we carried out an inquiry into Jonas’ “philosophical biology” with the aim of ultimately clarifying its anthropological and ethical relevance. It is well known that, according to Jonas, ethics has to be grounded in ontology. It is also well known that his inquiry into life provides such a basis. However, the secondary literature has generally failed to acknowledge and systematically analyze the feature of Jonas’ ontological reflection that supports this connection, namely the twofold dynamic of subjectification and objectification. As shown throughout this article, this dynamic characterizes organic life (its growth, its relationship with the world, and its overall evolution), human beings, and even ethics, and may be further understood as a dialectical relationship between a form of existence (*Dasein*) and its specific condition (*Sosein*). The interplay between existence and condition admits of both the continuity and discontinuity that we find in the various forms of organic existence, including human beings. This interplay is also at work in ethics, where the dialectical dynamic helps understanding the *Dasein* and *Sosein* of human beings. As a result, the related “duty to be truly human” is clarified in terms of being capable of preserving the dynamic correlation between subject and object, rather than being taken as a static conservation of a *status quo*. What has thus to be preserved unchanged in the human condition is not a certain content of the “image of man” or of the “ontological idea of man” but its capacity to correlate the basic dialectical dynamics of subjectification and objectification.

NOTES

1. Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, trans. Hans Jonas and David Herr (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 34, 136; henceforth IR, followed by page number.
2. Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 92; henceforth PL, followed by page number. On the notion of philosophical biology, see also Hans Jonas, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung: Gespräch mit Ingo Hermann in der Reihe Zeugen des Jahrhunderts*, ed. Ingo Hermann (Göttingen: Lamuv, 1991), p. 105.
3. See *Das Prinzip Verantwortung: Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilisation*, in *Grundlegung*, pt. 1 of *Das Prinzip Verantwortung*, ed. Dietrich Böhler and Bernadette Herrmann, vol. 2 of *Philosophische Hauptwerke*, pt. 1 of *Kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke von Hans Jonas*, ed. Dietrich Böhler et al. (Freiburg: Rombach, 2015), p. 91; henceforth PV, followed by page number. Literally, *Dasein* means “being-there,” or “existence,” while *Sosein* means “being-so, being in a certain way.” In his philosophical biology, Jonas extends the use of the first noun to non-human living beings and organisms (see, for example, Hans Jonas, *Organismus und Freiheit: Ansätze zu einer philosophischen Biologie*, in *Organismus und Freiheit: Philosophie des Lebens und Ethik der Lebenswissenschaften*, ed. Horst Gronke, vol. 1 of *Philosophische Hauptwerke* [Freiburg: Rombach, 2010], pp. 3, 13, 15–6, 164, 229, 317; henceforth OF, followed by page number; all translations from this text are our own; and for the English, see PL ix, 2, 4, 84, 126, 183), whereas in *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger reserved the term exclusively for human beings. *Sosein* is used already by Fichte, Schleiermacher, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. In the phenomenological tradition, it is casually used by Husserl to distinguish substratum from determination (see, e.g., Edmund Husserl, *Kritische Ideengeschichte*, vol. 1 of *Erste Philosophie [1923/24]*, ed. Rudolf Boehm, vol. 7 of *Husserliana*, ed. Ulrich Melle [Dordrecht: Springer, 1956], pp. 46, 251, 289, 361). Among other key thinkers who employ the term *Sosein* are Adolf Reinach (who understands it as the “what of a being” [*das Was eines Seiendes*]), Nicolai Hartmann (who draws attention to the fact that the relation between *Dasein* and *Sosein* sheds light on the connectedness of reality and ideality), Hans Driesch, and Max Scheler (see Adolf Reinach, *Über Phänomenologie*, in *Die Werke*, vol. 1 of *Sämtliche Werke: Textkritische Ausgabe in zwei Bänden*, ed. Karl Schuhmann and Barry Smith [München: Philosophia, 1989], pp. 532, 543–4, 549; Nicolai Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie* [Meisenheim am Glan: Westkulturverlag Anton Hain, 1948], p. 93; Hans Driesch, *Ordnungslehre: Ein System des nicht-metaphysischen Teiles der Philosophie* [Jena: E. Diederichs, 1923], pp. 88–143; Max Scheler, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, in *Späte Schriften*, ed. Manfred S. Frings, vol. 9 of *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Maria Scheler and Manfred S. Frings [München: Francke, 1976], p. 32; cited in Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer, eds., *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* [Basel: Schwabe, 1995], vol. 9, s.v. “Sosein”). As we shall see, Jonas uses the noun *Sosein*, which he translates into English as

“condition,” to express the qualitative achievements of life’s dynamic as reflected in the human being’s specificity.

4. Paul Ricœur, “La responsabilité et la fragilité de la vie: Éthique et philosophie de la biologie chez Hans Jonas,” *Le messager européen* 5:1 (1991), pp. 203–18; henceforth EPJ, followed by page number; all translations of this text are our own.
5. See Vittorio Hösle, “Ontology and Ethics in Hans Jonas,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 23:1 (2001), pp. 31–50.
6. The preface to the English edition (IR ix–xii) is slightly different and presents no reference to “der endgültig entfesselte Prometheus.” It does, however, refer to our technologically enhanced “Promethean Power” (IR x). References to the “unbound Prometheus” are found on IR 178, 185.
7. See also Hans Jonas, “Life and Organism (1966/67),” in *Leben und Organismus*, ed. Jens Peter Brune and Jens Ole Beckers, vol. 3 of *Vorlesungen*, pt. 2 of *Kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke von Hans Jonas* (Freiburg: Rombach, 2016), pp. 446–7.
8. Basically, Jonas’ argument can be summarized as follows: First, the phenomenon of *life* is a *purpose* of nature, which becomes self-evident in the capacity of human beings to set and achieve aims; second, the *purposiveness* evidenced by life and ultimately by the specificity of human beings and their sensitivity to “having to be” is “a fundamental self-affirmation of being, which posits it *absolutely* as the better over against nonbeing” (IR 81); third, there is an “ontological axiom,” according to which purposiveness is a “good-in-itself, of which we grasp with intuitive certainty that it is infinitely superior to any purposelessness of being” (IR 80); fourth, the ontological axiom gains an *obligating force* over human liberty, which “is no longer its automatic executor but, with the power obtained from knowledge, can become its destroyer as well” (IR 82); fifth, human beings have the ethical duty to offset indiscriminate freedom with *responsibility*. On this aspect of Jonas’ thinking, see, among others, Hösle, “Ontology and Ethics in Hans Jonas”; Theresa Morris, *Hans Jonas’s Ethic of Responsibility: From Ontology to Ecology* (New York: SUNY Press, 2013); Michael Hauskeller, “The Ontological Ethics of Hans Jonas,” in *Medicine and Society: New Perspectives in Continental Philosophy*, ed. Darian Meacham (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), pp. 39–55; Paolo Becchi and Roberto Franzini Tibaldeo, “The Vulnerability of Life in the Philosophy of Hans Jonas,” in *Human Dignity of the Vulnerable in the Age of Rights: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Aniceto Masferrer and Emilio García-Sánchez (Dordrecht: Springer, 2016), pp. 81–120; Robert Theis, *Hans Jonas: Etappen seines Denkwegs* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2019), pp. 29–49; and Lewis Coyne, “Values and the Good,” chap. 4 of *Hans Jonas: Life, Technology and the Horizons of Responsibility* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), pp. 95–116.
9. The Jonas and Herr English translation is: “[we are charged] with ensuring that there *be* a future mankind” (IR 40).
10. In this context, Jonas’ conjoint use of *Dasein* and *Sosein* is an allusion to Hartmann’s *Ontology: Laying the Foundations*, trans. Keith R. Peterson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 99–162, which was first published in 1935

- (see pp. 81–138). On Hartmann and Jonas, see also Danielle Lories and Olivier Depré, *Vie et liberté: Phénoménologie, nature et éthique chez Hans Jonas* (Paris: Vrin, 2003), pp. 175–8; and Karim Akerma, “Toward an Ontology of Consciousness with Nicolai Hartmann and Hans Jonas,” in *Ontology of Consciousness: Percipient Action*, ed. Helmut Wautischer (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), pp. 449–74.
11. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). For a comparison and critical overview of Jonas’ “idea of man” and Arendt’s “human condition,” see Nathalie Frogneux, “Hans Jonas développe-t-il une anthropologie arendtienne?,” *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 94:4 (1996), pp. 677–86; and Klaus Harms, *Hannah Arendt und Hans Jonas* (Berlin: WiKu, 2003).
 12. See also Hans Jonas, “Naturwissenschaft versus Natur-Verantwortung?,” in *Ethik für die Zukunft: Im Diskurs mit Hans Jonas*, ed. Dietrich Böhler and Ingrid Hoppe (München: Beck, 1994), pp. 208–9.
 13. To fully understand Jonas’ warning—especially in times of technological development—not to ground ethics solely on the pursuit of well-being and happiness, see PL 188–210.
 14. See, for example, Strachan Donnelley, “Hans Jonas and Ernst Mayr: On Organic Life and Human Responsibility,” in *The Legacy of Hans Jonas: Judaism and the Phenomenon of Life*, ed. Hava Tirosh-Samuelson and Christian Wiese (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 277–8.
 15. Hans Jonas, “Biological Foundations of Individuality,” in *Philosophical Essays: From Ancient Creed to Technological Man* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), pp. 185–205; henceforth BFI, followed by page number.
 16. See also Hans Jonas, *Memoirs*, trans. Krishna Winston, ed. Christian Wiese (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2008), pp. 227–8.
 17. For a historical inquiry into the relationship between metabolism and individuality, see Hannah Landecker, “Metabolism, Autonomy, and Individuality,” in *Biological Individuality: Integrating Scientific, Philosophical, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Scott Lidgard and Lynn K. Nyhart (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), pp. 225–48.
 18. Jonas also discusses this in one of his lectures: “What seems to be preservation is in fact not to be subsumed under the general physical principle of conservation, but this ‘preservation’ involves the constantly going beyond the given position, and preservation is, indeed, not the proper term to describe what really happens” (Jonas, “Life and Organism [1966/67],” p. 453). The self-maintenance of the organic individual’s own *being in a certain way* (that is, its specific “condition”) is dialectically related to a tendency to move constantly *beyond* the latter in some respect (ibid., p. 454). In the last section of this article, we will analyze the relevance of this dialectical dynamic to human *Dasein* (existence) and *Sosein* (condition). See also Hans Jonas, *Organism and Freedom: An Essay in Philosophical Biology*, ed. Jens Ole Beckers and Florian Preußger, online appendix to *Organismus und Freiheit*, p. 58, http://hans-jonas-edition.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/KGA_Hans-Jonas-Kontext-Bd.-II-Organism-and-

- Freedom.pdf (accessed September 2, 2020). For an interesting commentary on this work by Jonas, see Coyne, *Hans Jonas*, esp. pp. 37–94.
19. See Morris, *Hans Jonas's Ethic of Responsibility*, p. 61; and Lawrence Vogel, "Evolution and the Meaning of Being: Heidegger, Jonas and Nihilism," *Continental Philosophy Review* 51:1 (2018), pp. 65–79.
 20. See Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 3; *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), p. 13.
 21. See Aristotle, *Physics*, II.2, 194a and II.3, 195a24. For a critical analysis of Aristotle's influence on Jonas, see Coyne, *Hans Jonas*.
 22. See also Hans Jonas, "Change and Permanence: On the Possibility of Understanding History," in *Philosophical Essays*, p. 245; and Adolf Portmann, "L'autoprésentation, motif de l'élaboration des formes vivantes," in *Phénoménologie et philosophie de la nature*, ed. Pierre Destrée and Jacques Dewitte, special issue of *Études phénoménologiques* 12:23–24 (1996), pp. 156–7.
 23. On Jonas' adoption of the notion of scale in biology and its relation to evolutionary theory, see Vittorio Hösle, "Hans Jonas's Position in the History of German Philosophy," trans. Margaret Vince, in *The Legacy of Hans Jonas*, p. 32; Morris, *Hans Jonas's Ethic of Responsibility*, pp. 52–7, 77–86; and Vogel, "Evolution and the Meaning of Being," pp. 68–9.
 24. This aspect of Jonas' thought has not yet been duly acknowledged or explicitly connected to the dynamic of individuation that we are currently analyzing. For example, while Marie-Geneviève Pinsart seems to overlook the relevance of the dynamic of individuation, Theis' and Morris' accurate but concise accounts of Jonas' ontology call for a more exhaustive inquiry into his dialectical dynamic of life (see Marie-Geneviève Pinsart, *Jonas et la liberté: Dimensions théologiques, ontologiques, éthiques et politiques* [Paris: Vrin, 2002]; Theis, *Hans Jonas*, pp. 17–27; Morris, *Hans Jonas's Ethic of Responsibility*, esp. pp. 77–87).
 25. See also Vogel's discussion of this passage in his "Evolution and the Meaning of Being," p. 69.
 26. See also *Memoirs*, pp. 220–45. Theis discusses this theme in "Hans Jonas et la question de la destination de l'homme," in *Hans Jonas*, ed. Jean-Claude Gens and Eric Pommier, special issue of *Alter: Revue de Phénoménologie* 22:1 (2014), pp. 29–46. On the notion of "cosmogonic eros" and the relationship with God, see Hans Jonas, "Matter, Mind, and Creation: Cosmological Evidence and Cosmogonic Speculation," in *Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good after Auschwitz*, ed. Lawrence Vogel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996), pp. 173–4; Udo Lenzig, *Das Wagnis der Freiheit: Der Freiheitsbegriff im philosophischen Werk von Hans Jonas aus theologischer Perspektive* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006); Emidio Spinelli, "Dieu, l'homme et le cosmos selon Hans Jonas: Existence et évolution," trans. Tomaso Berni Canani, *Archives de Philosophie* 79:3 (2016), pp. 539–51; Emidio Spinelli, *Obiettivo Platone: A lezione da Hans Jonas* (Pisa: ETS, 2019); and Coyne, *Hans Jonas*, pp. 60–3.

27. On the relationship between desire, emotion, and need, see Renaud Barbaras, "Life, Movement, and Desire," trans. Jen McWeeny, *Research in Phenomenology* 38:1 (2008), pp. 3–17.
28. On life (and death), see also Hans Jonas, "Against the Stream: Comments on the Definition and Redefinition of Death," in *Philosophical Essays*, pp. 134–5; *Technik, Medizin und Ethik: Praxis des Prinzips Verantwortung* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1985), p. 227; and *Problemi di libertà*, trans. Angela Michelis, ed. Emidio Spinelli (Torino: Aragno, 2010), pp. 63–5.
29. On this tendency to surpass—*déhiscence* in French—, see Nathalie Frogneux, "L'être déhiscent de l'humain," introduction to *L'être déhiscent de l'humain*, special issue of *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 100:3 (2002), pp. 357–59.
30. Of course, Jonas is aware of a second kind of "postdualistic monism," namely modern idealism (PL 16). However, he says that only the first kind of postdualistic monism, namely modern materialism, is worthy of philosophical and ontological attention, since it represents "the real ontology of our world since the Renaissance, the real heir to dualism" (PL 20).
31. See also Hösle, "Ontology and Ethics in Hans Jonas," esp. pp. 36–9.
32. See also Hans Jonas, "Tool, Image, and Grave: On What Is beyond the Animal in Man," in *Mortality and Morality*, p. 79. On the relationship between animals and human beings, see Adolf Portmann, *Aufbruch der Lebensforschung* (Zürich: Rhein, 1965).
33. On the relationship between image faculty and reflection in Jonas, see Roberto Rubio, "Hans Jonas como teórico de la imagen: Análisis crítico de la recepción de Jonas en el marco de la *Bildwissenschaft*," *Alter* 22:1 (2014), pp. 63–77. For an overall account of the *differentia specifica* of humanity in Jonas, see Coyne, *Hans Jonas*, pp. 79–94.
34. The German expression that Jonas uses for "true man" is "der Mensch im vollen Sinne" (OF 320). In *The Imperative of Responsibility*, Jonas opts for the locutions "genuine human life" (*das echte menschliche Leben*) (IR 11; PV 40) and "genuine man" (*der eigentliche Mensch*) (IR 200; PV 409).
35. Jonas is referring to Augustine's *Confessions*, bk. 10, chap. 33, §50. On the idea of confronting oneself, see Hans Jonas, "The Abyss of the Will: Philosophical Meditation on the Seventh Chapter of Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*," in *Philosophical Essays*, p. 340; and Morris, *Hans Jonas's Ethic of Responsibility*, pp. 42–3.
36. As Jonas claims, "Only over the immeasurable distance of being his own object can man 'have' himself. But he does have himself while no animal does" (PL 186).
37. For more on this twofoldness, see Jonas, "The Abyss of the Will," p. 344; and *Die Mythologische Gnosis*, vol. 1 of *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1934), p. 145. For commentary of this theme, see Lenzig, *Das Wagnis der Freiheit*, pp. 26, 36; Michael Bongardt, "God in the World of Man: Hans Jonas' Philosophy of Religion," in *Global Ethics and Moral Responsibility: Hans Jonas and His Critics*, ed. John-Stewart Gordon and Holger Burckhart (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014), p. 109; and Nathalie

Frogneux, "Présentation," in Hans Jonas, *La gnose et l'esprit de l'antiquité tardive: Histoire et méthodologie de la recherche*, trans. Nathalie Frogneux (Sesto San Giovanni: Mimésis, 2017), pp. 129–133.

38. Jonas, *Problemi di libertà*, p. 259.
39. However, it is noteworthy that in his otherwise excellent account of Jonas' perspective on the ethical ambivalence of human beings, Jacques Dewitte does not acknowledge the relationship between this human feature and the dialectic process of subjectification and objectification ("Préservation de l'humanité et image de l'homme," *Études phénoménologiques* 4:8 [1988], pp. 33–68). Morris also neglects to carry out an in-depth inquiry into this relationship (*Hans Jonas's Ethic of Responsibility*, pp. 84–6).
40. See Hans Jonas, *Augustin und das paulinische Freiheitsproblem: Eine philosophische Studie zum pelagianischen Streit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965); "The Abyss of the Will"; "Matter, Mind, and Creation," p. 177; and Jonas, *Problemi di libertà*. Indeed, according to Jonas, human beings encounter the ambiguity of their existential condition not only in the ethical domain but also in the aesthetic, emotional, and epistemic domains (see Hans Jonas, *Zwischen Nichts und Ewigkeit: Drei Aufsätze zur Lehre vom Menschen* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963], pp. 68–9; and IR 200–1; PV 409–10).
41. Jonas employs here the notions "idea" and "image" as synonyms, due to their common reference to *eidos*, namely "appearance" or "form" (see also PL 167, 184–5).
42. Jonas states, "Dynamism is the signature of modernity. It is not an accident, but an immanent property of the epoch, and until further notice it is our fate" (IR 119; PV 233). See also Jonas, *Technik, Medizin und Ethik*.
43. See also Dewitte, "Préservation de l'humanité et image de l'homme," pp. 44–5.
44. See also Jonas, "Matter, Mind, and Creation," p. 189.
45. On the theme of preservation, see also Lenzig, *Das Wagnis der Freiheit*; and Theis, *Hans Jonas*, pp. 44–5.
46. As a result, we agree with Coyne, according to whom Jonas' anthropological reflections culminate in the "discovery of the *true* image of Man—namely, humanity as responsible" (Coyne, *Hans Jonas*, p. 216n. 9; see also pp. 130–1).