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Philosophies of Life

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"Philosophy of life" is currently employed as a synonym or as a hyponym of "vitalism," "philosophy of nature," and "biological philosophy," labeling texts produced in completely different historical, geographic, and disciplinary contexts and bearing only certain family resemblances.[1] The expressions "*Philosophie des Lebens*" and "*Lebensphilosophie*" first appeared during the 1770s in the writings of mutually independent, non-academic German authors linked to the Romantic movement, such as Karl Philipp Moritz (1756–1793). Starting from the 1910s, they re-emerged in two essays written respectively by the Neo-Kantian philosopher Heinrich Rickert (1863–1936) and by the phenomenologist Max Scheler (1874–1928). With these key expressions, the two philosophers designated the doctrines of three other, older producers of philosophy, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), Henri Bergson (1859–1941), and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), who, nonetheless, never quoted one other, never met, and did not explicitly define their own work as a "philosophy of life"; after World War I, Rickert added to this small group of authors select other philosophers such as his colleague Georg Simmel (1858–1918), the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), and the pragmatist William James (1842–1910), despite the fact that they were not connected in any way. They also did not employ these expressions. Starting from the 1920s, the expressions *Philosophie des Lebens*

1 Recent studies on the topic include Karl Albert,*Lebensphilosophie: Von den Anfängen bei Nietzsche bis zu ihrer Kritik bei Lukács* (Freiburg im Breisgau:Alber, 1995); Ferdinand Fellmann, *Lebensphilosophie: Elemente einer Theorie der Selbsterfahrung* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1993); Ferdinand Fellmann, "Lebensphilosophie," in *Enzyklopädie Philosophie*, vol. 2, ed. Hans Jörg Sandkühler (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2010); Jürgen Große, *Lebensphilosophie* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2010); Robert Josef Kozljanič (ed.), *Lebensphilosophie: Eine Einführung* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004); Volker Schürmann, *Die Unergründlichkeit des Lebens: Lebens-Politik zwischen Biomacht und Kulturkritik* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011); and Gerald Hartung, *Lebensphilosophie*, in *Das Leben II: Historisch-Systematische Studien zur Geschichte eines Begriffs*, ed.Stephan Schaede, Gerald Hartung, and Tom Kleffmann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 309–326.

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and *Lebensphilosophie* spread in Germany, being used both by non-academic producers of philosophy – such as Oswald Spengler (1880–1936) and Ludwig Klages (1872–1956) – and by such academics as Dilthey's former student Georg Misch (1878–1965). During the Third Reich, while *völkisch* ideology took over Germany, many other minor cultural producers, promoting the regime's bio-political agenda, presented themselves, or were treated, as *Lebenphilosophen*; however, starting from the 1940s, their work was quickly forgotten. Between the end of the 1920s and the 1940s, with the translation and of some of the aforementioned authors' works into other languages, and the production in various languages of secondary literature dedicated to their work, the expression "philosophy of life" entered more common usage, being applied to the doctrines of other authors whose work was supposedly characterized by a metaphysical conception of life conceived as an original transformative force, and by their reliance on a method or a faculty irreducible to the ones used by science. Finally, from the 1970s on, the expression "philosophy of life" – *"philosophie de la vie," "filosofia della vita," "Lebensphilosophie"* – began to designate non-empirical doctrines stating the priority of "life" conceived as a principle irreducible to physicochemical causality or theories concerning "life" addressed to a broad lectureship. The work of philosophers as different as Georges Canguilhem (1904–1995), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995), and Michel Foucault (1924–1984), or even that of early modern philosophers such as Baruch Spinoza, started being classed under the banner "philosophy of life," again despite the fact that none of these authors ever employed the expression.

To understand this process of growing polysemy of the expression, it is necessary to consider it as the effect of a transformation that affected the terms "philosophy" and "life"; this transformation was the result of the increasing division and specialization of intellectual labor which triggered polemics and negotiations among protagonists of four types: (a) academic philosophers, (b) non-academic producers of philosophy, (c) academic producers of empirically based knowledge about biological and human phenomena – mainly naturalists, embryologists, physiologists,[2] and, later on, psychologists and sociologists – and, finally, starting from the 1930s, (d) ideologists directly tied to state apparatuses.

2 Robert J. Richards, *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behaviour* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

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The Birth of "Life" and the Birth of "Philosophy"

Since the time of early modernity the word "life" (*vita, vie, Leben*) had been used to designate both human existence and what characterizes a particular class of phenomena, living beings. To differentiate the first meaning from the second, one used theological expressions, such as "*vie spirituelle,*" "*geistiges Leben,*" or *vie intérieure*," and, starting from the 1870s, "*Erlebnis*." According to Giorgio Agamben's controversial thesis, this ambiguity was already present in ancient philosophy, in the distinction between *bios* (βίος) – or "qualified life," life proper to man, a political animal (*zōon politikon*) – and *zoê* (ζωή) – "bare life," biological life, the life proper to individuals deprived of rights inside the Greek *polis*.[3]

According to Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, it is only at the end of the eighteenth century that a consistent notion of biological life appears. Before, as Foucault famously wrote, "life did not exist."[4] Two key phenomena had been essential for the emergence of the modern notion of life: The first is the appearance of "vitalism," a type of endeavor proper to medical theories and practices, which isolated a distinct class of phenomena; the second is the work of naturalists, who contributed by unifying and specifying this class. In 1802, the term "biology" had been used by Treviranus, in his *Biology, or Philosophy of Living Nature*, and by Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck (1744–1829), in his *Research on the Organization of Living Bodies*. Both affirmed the existence of a science having a peculiar object: life. The "birth" of life, located at the convergence of the practice of medicine and natural sciences, implied a mutation of the image of nature, which was conceived as an historical and unitary process. Biology changed also the image of "man": By inscribing the history of humanity inside the history of life and by reducing man to one living being among others, the newborn science represented an impressive blow both against anthropocentrism and against the religious beliefs supporting it.

At the same moment, the word "philosophy" became involved in a transformation related to the one involving the term "life." During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the term had been semantically unstable, designating texts produced both inside and outside academic spaces, a part of which would today be labeled as "science." By contrast, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the word was used to indicate

3 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.)

4 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1970), 139.

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a particular cognitive practice, practiced almost exclusively inside the university, aimed at providing a logical and synthetic ground for the totality of human knowledge and values. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was among the protagonists of this change, which led to institutional consequences throughout Europe because of the Humboldtian reform of the medieval university.[5] He granted the "scientists" – a word that progressively came to substitute for the term "natural philosopher" – the task of explaining phenomena, and to the "philosophers" he gave the responsibility of studying their conditions of possibility. On the one hand, the natural world would be studied experimentally following the *a priori* categories of causality, space, and time, thus it would perforce be deprived of all purposiveness. On the other hand, the idea of will and agency would henceforth be limited to human subjectivity.

Even if Kant had placed life in continuity with inanimate matter, in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), he left a breach open for a possible dynamic and teleological description of it. By admitting that the hypothesis of the existence of purposiveness in nature had a heuristic utility, he suggested to naturalists notions such as *Bildungstrieb* (formative force) and *Lebenskraft* (vital force).[6] After Kant, thinkers such as Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1852) and Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854) opposed the limitations imposed by the author of the three *Critiques*. Their doctrines, known as *Naturphilosophie*, attempted to provide a metaphysical framework capable of giving a meaning to the new science of life and to discoveries such as electromagnetism. These authors, who were describing a non-deterministic universe animated by spiritual forces, were influenced by Romanticism's reaction against a narrow Enlightenment rationalism and the Industrial Revolution, namely by its emphasis on feeling and immediacy, by its insistence on affective and intuited experience as opposed to the narrowness of rationality and, finally, by its search for a unifying principle prior to the "abstractions" of scientific reason. In France, Schelling influenced the work of the philosopher Félix Ravaisson (1813–1900), who, in his *On Habit* (1842), reintroduced agency and freedom into the mechanistic natural world of Cartesianism, describing a universe organized according to a hierarchy of growing degrees of perfection and freedom. Ravaisson also inherited from Schelling the idea that, because of

5 See Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Boston: Belknap, 1998).

6 See Timothy Lenoir, *The Strategy of Life* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1982); and Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002).

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nature's purposiveness and creativity, the only way to understand it was by supplementing intellect with an aesthetic intuition.

Meanwhile, in Germany, by 1828, the synthesis of urea – which was aimed at proving the continuity between animate and inanimate matter – and the discovery of the conservation of energy and the formulation of the laws of thermodynamics had caused the decline of *Naturphilosophie* and tipped the scales in favor of the mechanistic theory of life. In 1842, the physiologist and philosopher Hermann Lotze (1817–1881) published an article, "Leben, Lebenskraft," and a book, *Allgemeine Pathologie*, which together constituted an attack against the notion of a "vital force" and, more generally, against all speculative theories of life such as the ones proposed by the *Naturphilosophen*. As a result, starting from the beginning of the 1850s, the majority of German physiologists found themselves in agreement on rejecting vitalism and teleology and supporting a mechanistic view. In France, Auguste Comte (1798–1857) played the same role: He opposed metaphysical notions such as "vital force" and "soul," and refused to draw any analogy between living beings and the human mind.[7]

From the 1860s until the end of the century, the relation between philosophy, dominated by the Kantian approach, and the life sciences, progressively unified by the theory of evolution, had been regulated by a compromise: To the biologists were allocated the facts as interpreted according to a mechanistic causality; to the philosophers, their conditions of possibility.

However, in France, the referential works of Jules Lachelier (1832–1918) – *The Foundation of Induction* (1872) – and Émile Boutroux (1845–1921) – *The Contingency of the Natural Laws* (1874) – which were guided by an original interpretation of the third *Critique*, and influenced by Félix Ravaisson, left the door open for a different approach to nature, once conceived as a universe organized hierarchically according to growing degrees of contingency, freedom, and spirituality. The orientation proper to these philosophers had often been called "*spiritual realism*"[8], following the expression coined by Ravaisson.

7 John A. McCarthy, Stephanie M. Hilger, Heather I. Sullivan, and Nicholas Saul (eds.), *The Early History of Embodied Cognition from 1740–1920: The Lebenskraft-Debate and Radical Reality in German Science, Music, and Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

8 For "spiritualist realism" and its heritage, see Dominique Janicaud,*Ravaisson et la métaphysique: Une généalogie du spiritualisme français* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1997); François Azouvi, *La Gloire de Bergson: Essai sur le magistère philosophique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007); Giuseppe Bianco, *Après Bergson: Portrait de groupe avec philosophe* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2015); and Larry S. McGrath, "Alfred Fouillée between Science and Spiritualism," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 12(2) (2015), 295–323.

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On the one hand, these thinkers inscribed man inside the process of evolution and, on the other hand, they insisted that this process was not mechanical, but was teleological or, at least, indeterminate. Nonetheless, just like von Hartmann and Nietzsche, these "spiritual realists" occupied peripheral positions in the academic space: Alfred Fouillé (1838–1918) – author of *The Evolutionism of the Ideas-Forces* (1890), his stepson Jean-Marie Guyau (1854–1888) – author of *A Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction* (1885), which deeply influenced Nietzsche – and, finally, Henri Bergson. In his best-seller *The Creative Evolution* (1907), Bergson discussed in detail the theory of evolution, proposing an idea of life as a unitary process of creation irreducible both to mechanical and to teleological explanations. This process was likely to be grasped through the collaboration between biology and philosophy. The latter, using a particular faculty, intuition, was able to guide science and redirect its intellectual efforts. Bergson characterized life by analogy with the *duration* of the human subject he studied in his first two monographs, *Time and Free Will* (1889) and *Matter and Memory* (1898): He conceived both phenomena as temporal processes of enrichment and continuous production of novelty.

"Philosophy of Life" Outside and Inside Academia

During the long nineteenth century, because of the polysemy of the words "life" and "philosophy" and because of the process of disciplinarization, the expression "philosophy of life" was used with two meanings. While in English, French, Spanish, and Italian, the expression was used, though very seldom, as a synonym of biology, in France, in 1838, Auguste Comte introduced the expression "biological philosophy" in his *Cours de philosophie positive* to designate the life sciences. "Biological philosophy" retained this meaning at least until the mid 1920s.

Contrasting with France, in Germany from the 1770s onwards, the terms *Philosophie des Lebens* and *Lebensphilosophie* designated a peculiar literary genre consisting in edifying tales, aphorisms, and "psychological" analysis indicating a wise way of conducting one's existence.[9] The emergence of this popular philosophy had been made possible by the expansion of the book market, by

9 See Georg Pflug, "Lebensphilosophie," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer, and Gottfried Gabriel, 12 vols. (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 1980), vol. V, 135–140; and Gertrude Kühne-Bertram, *Aus dem Leben, zum Leben: Entstehung, Wesen und Bedeutung populärer Lebensphilosophien in der Geistesgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1989).

the existence, since Christian Wolff (1679–1754), of a "*Philosophia practica*," and, finally, by the existence of a field called "anthropology."[10] This field was popularized by books such as *Anthropologie für Aerzte und Weltweis* (*Anthropology for Physicians and the Worldwise*, 1772) by the physician Ernst Platner (1744–1818), whose work played a formative role for the most important of these "*Lebensphilosophen*," namely Karl Philipp Moritz (1756–1793). Moritz had been the author of *Beiträge zur Philosophie des Lebens aus dem Tagebuch eines Freimäurers* (*Contributions to the Philosophy of Life from the Diary of a Freemason*, 1780), but had also been the editor of one of the first journals of psychology, the *Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde* (1783–1793). As a result, from the 1780s onward, in connection with a new interest in the French moralists, terms such as *Lebenskunst* (art of living), *Lebenslehre* and *Lebensweisheit* (wisdom in life) began to appear.

This kind of *Lebensphilosophie* shared many features with the Romantic Movement – namely its eclecticism, anti-scholasticism, and anti-academicism. In the years following 1800, the philosopher Wilhelm Traugott Krug (1770–1842) – who would later become Kant's successor in the chair of logic and metaphysics at the University of Königsberg – gave a first formal definition of "*Lebensphilosophie*." He defined it as a "*Philosophie für die Welt*" – a philosophy for everyone, constructed fragmentarily – opposing it to the "*Schulphilosophie*" – the systematic philosophy practised in the academic spaces. This definition appears again in a dictionary published by Krug in 1828[11] and, the same year, in a book by Friedrich von Schlegel (1772–1829), *Philosophie des Lebens*, a collected volume of lectures he gave in Vienna. By defining the object of philosophy as the "inner spiritual life" (*geistige Leben*), Schlegel counterposed the "philosophy of life" to "scholastic philosophy," implicitly designating with this expression the idealism dominating German institutions. In fact, at the same moment, in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, published posthumously (1836), Hegel discredited the genre, considering it a mere continuation of Wolff's "*Philosophia practica*."

After the decline of German idealism, the heritage of this popular and extra-academic "philosophy of life" – combined with that of Romanticism – influenced cultural producers peripheral to the academic institutions, such as

10 See Odo Marquard, "Anthropologie," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer, and Gottfried Gabriel, 12 vols. (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 1971), vol. I, 362–374; John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002).

11 Wilhelm Traugott Krug, *Allgemeines Handwörterbuch der philosophischen Wissenschaften nebst ihrer Literatur und Geschichte* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1828).

Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Both harshly criticized Kantianism and Idealism, the German academic system, and the supposed dogmatism of the empirical sciences; both were influenced by the French moralists and authored books whose titles evoked the approach and the aims of *Lebensphilosophie*. These include, for instance, Schopenhauer's *Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life* (1841) and Nietzsche's *Gay Science* (1882). Nonetheless, neither Schopenhauer nor Nietzsche used the expressions "*Lebensphilosophie*" or "*Philosophie des Lebens*," which circulated widely outside of the university.

These expressions appeared again under the pen of an academic in 1913, in an essay entitled "Versuche einer Philosophie des Lebens,"[12] authored by Max Scheler, a disciple of the Fichtean philosopher Rudolf Eucken (1846–1926). With this manifesto Scheler tried to intervene strategically in a context marked by a "*Steit*," a quarrel that appeared between 1895 and 1910 in a conflictual space created by the interaction of protagonists of three types who were fighting to monopolize control of the term "life": (a) academic philosophers, (b) non-academic philosophers, and (c) biologists. This quarrel around life could be renamed the "*Biologismus-Streit*" by analogy with the more renowned *Psychologismus-Streit* to which it was related,[13] and can be considered the origin of the "philosophy of life" of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s.

At the center of the *Biologismus-Streit* there was one problem, which can be summarized by the title of the most famous of Scheler's books, namely *The Position of Man in the Cosmos* (1928). This problem was not exclusively theoretical, but practical, as well: Once the place of man had been established, one could also establish what type of knowledge had the last word on man's "human" essence.

Kant and Darwin

Ever since Darwin's *The Descent of Man* (1871), the theory of evolution had tried to give an account of the human phenomenon by locating humans within the framework of a history of life: Hominization was nothing but the result of the combined effect of the process of adaptation and genetic variations. This apparently simple explanation was the result of the

12 Max Scheler, "Versuche einer Philosophie des Lebens" (1913–1915), in*Vom Umsturz der Werte: Abhandlungen und Aufsätze* in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. M. S. Frings and Max Scheler, 16 vols. (Bern: Franke Verlag, 1954–1998), vol. III, 313–339.

13 See Martin Kusch, *Psychologism: A Case Study in the Sociology of Philosophical Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1998).

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convergence of different areas of science that had emerged during the nineteenth century, such as comparative anatomy, paleontology, embryology, and genetics. Since 1860, "philosophy" – intended as a specialized form of knowledge practised in the academic spaces – had been providing, along with religion, a moral and epistemological "spiritual supplement" aimed at organizing empirical knowledge and reflecting on its grounds and consequences; nonetheless philosophy started coming under attack from the empirical psychology proposed by authors such as Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801–1887), Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920), and their students, whose ambition was to naturalize man's behavior and cognition. To survive as a discipline, philosophy had to be able to counter the attacks of both biology and psychology and to locate an object that it could claim as its own. During the 1910s and 1920s, a part of philosophy had to turn itself into a "philosophy of life" able to resist biology's "mechanical reductionism" and, then, it had to turn into a "philosophical anthropology" able to counter psychology's and sociology's supposed "reductionisms."

From the 1870s onwards, after the decline of German idealism and of *Naturphilosophie*, two intellectual forces were dominant; the Neo-Kantians, divided between the Baden School and the Marburg School, and the Darwinians, whose most famous spokesman was Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919).[14] Haeckel was both the main introducer of Darwinism and a scholar whose authority and originality had been internationally recognized. The alliance that the Neo-Kantians signed with the Darwinians was similar to the one they made with the German "positivists." Both alliances were strategic: They were aimed at opposing the old idealistic philosophy and the religious and reactionary forces of *Thron und Altar*.[15] Furthermore, they were meant to counter the doctrine of the unconscious – which was anti-Kantian, anti-scientific, and anti-academic – which was being promoted by von Hartmann and by other authors inspired by Schopenhauer, who were gaining much success during the 1870s. The Neo-Kantians were satisfied with evolution theory's methodological mechanism, and with its opposition to the metaphysical idea of vital teleology; but they demanded as well that the disciplinary frontiers established by Kant, according to which German academia was structured, be respected.

Nonetheless, both the biologists and the philosophers expressed a growing dissatisfaction with the limits that this pact imposed on their activity. These

14 See Fredrick Beiser, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism, 1796–1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Robert J. Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

15 See Beiser, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism*.

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limits were traced over onto the totality of the object they were supposed to be studying from two completely different points of view: *life*. It is not by chance that the term *Erleben* (and *Erlebnis*) acquired a technical meaning during the 1870s, namely after the success of Darwinism and the emergence of scientific psychology.

Wilhelm Dilthey was among those most influential in this direction. He had systematically used the two terms in his *The Life of Schleiermacher* (1870), and conceptually defined them in his *Introduction to the Human Sciences* (1883). In the concept of *Erleben* there converged three different conceptual aspects that were already present in the Romantic movement: (a) the immediacy (*Unmittelbarkeit*) of the relation between man and world, preceding any rational construction; (b) the meaningfulness (*Bedeutsamkeit*) of life, which was tied to its interconnected historical totality; and (c) the incommensurability of life's content itself, which gave the concept an aesthetic dimension.[16] Starting from this concept, Dilthey created a series of categories derived from the root "*Leben*." Even though he "manifested no special interest in biology and did not use the term 'life' in a biological sense,"[17] Dilthey was witnessing both the success of Darwinism and that of empirical psychology. One of his objectives in the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* was explicit: to subtract a part of human psychology, which he called "descriptive," from the grasp of the sciences of nature (*Naturwissenschaften*) so as to annex it to the sciences of the spirit (*Geisteswissenschaften*). According to Dilthey, descriptive psychology's object was historical, and therefore this science had to use a particular hermeneutical method, that of "understanding" (*Verständnis*), which was irreducible to the one used by the natural sciences.

The case of Rudolf Eucken, Scheler's mentor, a Catholic philosopher and Haeckel's colleague at the university of Jena, is similar to that of Dilthey. Eucken criticized materialism for being the cause of the loss of real values in modern society, proposing instead an idealistic philosophy based on the concept of *Geistesleben*, or "spiritual life." According to Eucken, only idealism would be able to save civilization, by promoting the "spiritual" dimension proper to human life. Ever since his first works from the late 1870s, until *Der*

16 Konrad Cramer, "Erleben, Erlebnis," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer, and Gottfried Gabriel, 12 vols. (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 1972), vol. II, 702–711; and Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

17 Theodore Plantinga, *Historical Understanding in the Thought of Wilhelm Dilthey* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1980), 74. See also Rudolf A. Makkreel, *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

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Sinn und Wert des Lebens (*The Sense and Value of Life*, 1908), a book for which he was awarded a Nobel prize, Eucken's production had been characterized by a progressive multiplication of concepts and terms derived from the root *Leben*. Much like Dilthey, Eucken did not conceive of "*Leben*" in a biological way; on the contrary, both of them made biological life subordinate to a "spiritual" life, which could be grasped only by philosophy, the queen of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. Even though both Dilthey and Eucken were completely uninterested in the advancements of the *Naturwissenschaften*, their usage of concepts derived from the root *Leben* is the clear sign of a growing concern that was being felt by the academic philosophers.

At the end of the nineteenth century Ernst Haeckel broke the nonaggression pact between the biologists and the philosophers. With the publication of his bestseller *The Riddle of the Universe* (1899), Haeckel became the herald of Monism, a totalizing and supposedly scientific vision of the world, which claimed to liberate man from both religion and philosophy. The philosopher he most wanted to vanquish was Immanuel Kant, whose legacy still dominated the German university system. *Die Welträthsel*, which was also a plea for empirical psychology against all the philosophical and theological descriptions of man, raised a general outcry from the entire philosophical community. From that moment on, all Neo-Kantians became hostile toward most of the Darwinians.[18]

A few years later, a new outrage emerged from the field of the life sciences, in the person of Hans Driesch (1867–1941), one of Haeckel's pupils. During the 1890s Driesch abandoned his master's rigid mechanical reductionism, separated himself from Darwinism, and formulated a new teleological approach to living organisms that he named "neo-vitalism." In an essay of 1893, *Die Biologie als selbständige Grundwissenschaft*, Driesch defended biology as an "independent basic science," and in the following years, imitating Haeckel, he progressively abandoned the laboratory to produce writings targeting a broader readership. This evolution led him to a *Habilitationsschrift* – under the supervision of the Neo-Kantian philosopher Wilhelm Windelband (1841–1915) and the experimental psychologist Oswald Kulpe (1862–1915) – and, in 1911, to an appointment to the chair of "natural philosophy" at the University of Heidelberg, one of the strongholds of Neo-Kantianism. Because of its content, Driesch's work had attracted the attention of some philosophers: Heinrich Rickert mentioned *Die Biologie als selbständige Grundwissenschaft* in his *The Limits of Concept Formation in the Natural*

18 Beiser, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism*.

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Sciences (1897), where he established the difference between the sciences of man or of culture (*Kulturwissenschaften*) and the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*), and Eduard von Hartmann discussed Driesch's *The History and Theory of Vitalism* (1905) in his *The Problem of Life* (1906).[19] Driesch's research initially could have looked like a possible step in the direction of a less imperialistic conception of biology, a conception more friendly to philosophy. But in 1907, two years after the publication of his book on vitalism, in *The Science and Philosophy of the Organism* (1908), Driesch decided to aggressively face some problems that, until then, had been considered exclusively philosophical. That was evident from the book's title, which announced itself as both scientific *and* philosophical. By doing that, Driesch followed the path taken by Haeckel in his two bestsellers, *The Riddle of the Universe* and the following *Wonders of life: A Popular Study of Biological Philosophy* (1904). Here, he dared to treat his work as "biological philosophy."

In the last chapter of *The Science and Philosophy of the Organism*, "The History of Humanity," Driesch directly criticized Rickert: Against the division he had established between *Kulturwissenschaften* and *Naturwissenschaften*, Driesch was advocating the possibility of understanding the history of human culture on the basis of the positive knowledge proper to the sciences of life. He was also advocating a reform of German universities going against the distinction between the two types of knowledge. Finally, in 1908, Driesch published "Bergson, der biologische Philosoph," a positive review of Bergson's *L'Évolution créatrice*, a book which had already caused outrage among the French Neo-Kantians. In the review he praised Bergson for his philosophical understanding of life and on account of the possible alliance between a neo-vitalist biology and an anti-Kantian metaphysics.

Rickert's reaction came some years later, and it was indirect. In 1912, Windelband's protégé published in *Logos* – the journal of the Neo-Kantian Baden School, to which he belonged – an article entitled "Life-Values and Cultural Values." As the title clearly stated, Rickert's point of view was that of *Wertphilosophie* ("philosophy of value"), a specialty proper to the school of his master Windelband. The essay was directed against what he called "*Lebensphilosophie*" or "*biologistische Modephilosophie*" ("fashionable biological philosophy"), and its arguments were very similar to the ones presented nine years later in the book *The Philosophy of Life* (1920). Under the category of *Lebensphilosophie* Rickert placed all the discourses pretending to explain

19 Maurizio Esposito, *Romantic Biology, 1890–1945* (London: Routledge, 2003).

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human values, norms, and culture from a purely biological standpoint. This explanation consisted in what Rickert called a reduction of everything to "*bloßen Leben*," namely to "mere life," "bare life," or "naked life," an expression that was to be used, no more than one year later, by Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) in an essay on violence[20] from which Agamben drew inspiration when he wrote *Homo Sacer*. *Lebensphilosophie*, inspired by modern biology, and especially by evolutionism, gave priority to a notion of life which was, nonetheless, metaphysical and potentially irrational. Life was conceived as a force, accessible through a particular method or faculty, which was irreducible to the scientific ones.

Epistemological Borders

The Science and Philosophy of the Organism represented only the last of a series of writings that the German Neo-Kantian mandarins perceived as attacks on the legitimacy of academic philosophy.[21] Rickert's first polemical target was neither Driesch nor Haeckel, but Friedrich Nietzsche, who was receiving belated success both inside and outside the academic space.

Until the mid 1890s, the author of the *Genealogy of Morals* was almost unknown: He was just one of the several writers who had tried to respond to the problem of the collapse of transcendent certainties and values caused by the growing success of the life sciences, by the failure of the revolution of 1848, and, finally, by the economic crash of 1873. The "death of God," far from being Nietzsche's trademark, was a recurrent theme before him. The crisis into which German culture plunged starting from the 1960s provoked the belated success of Schopenhauer, who had been ignored until then. In his *The World as Will and Representation* (1818, expanded in 1844), influenced by readings in the life sciences, Schopenhauer described the phenomenal world as the product of an unconscious, blind, and insatiable will to live, academic philosophy as useless, and renunciation of the world as the only solution to the suffering caused by life. The belated success of Schopenhauer's philosophy starting from the mid 1860s, increased by that of von Hartmann's *Philosophy of the Unconscious* (1869), caused an intellectual dispute around the value of "life," understood as

20 Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 277–300.

21 See the essential book by Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).

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human existence: the *Pessimismus-Streit*.[22] This dispute mobilized several academic and non-academic actors: the first to respond was the positivist philosopher and economist Karl Eugen Dühring (1833–1921), in a book paradigmatically entitled *The Value of Life* (1865), but the following years were especially marked by the reaction of the Neo-Kantian community. Both the Neo-Kantians and the positivists could not accept anything of Schopenhauer's philosophy. His misanthropy, his pessimistic ascetic ethics, his jointly anti-Kantian and anti-scientific endeavor, and, finally, his contempt for academia, were all going against everything that both academic philosophers and scientists were defending.

Nietzsche's books started having success both in the academic world and in popular culture toward the end of the century;[23] a few years before the publication of Rickert's essay, literary journals such as *Die Tat*[24] were contributing to the constitution of new ideologies promoting life, energy, and youth, and were mixing Nietzsche's vitalism, Haeckel's monism, and Bergson's spiritualism.

In 1907, the sociologist Georg Simmel (1858–1918), one of Rickert's colleagues and friends, published a monograph, *Schopenhauer und Nietzsche*, which was the result of a series of lectures he had been giving at the University of Berlin. At the turn of the century, because of the development of German universities, lecturers like Simmel abandoned academia, or struggled to prove their talent to the institutions by attracting to their courses as many students as possible. One way to attract more students was by introducing new questions and new authors: This is what Simmel did with Nietzsche, whom he started reading while he was finishing his book on money, at the precise moment in which the author of *Also sprach Zarathustra* was having success. Simmel's *Philosophie des Geldes* treated, through the question of money, a topic which was a trademark of the Southwestern School, or Baden School: that of values. In the book on Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, Simmel treated the two authors as serious philosophers able to respond to philosophical questions such as those of values and historicity, and he used them to discuss the "vital" origin of values, reconnecting to a discussion which had originally started during the 1870s, during the *Pessimismus-Streit*.

22 Fredrick C. Beiser, *Weltschmerz: Pessimism in German* Philosophy, *1860–1900* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016).

23 Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

24 Marino Pulliero, *Une modernité explosive: La revue* Die Tat *dans les renouveaux religieux, culturels et politiques de l'Allemagne d'avant 1914–1918* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2008).

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With this book, Simmel started locating his former "sociological philosophy" in a metaphysical framework inspired by Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Bergson.[25] This development, which led to the publication of his last book, *The View of Life* (1918), progressively irritated his former friend and colleague Rickert.

The second of Rickert's targets was Henri Bergson (1859–1941). After the publication of the *Évolution créatrice*, Bergson's texts began to enjoy some success in Germany,[26] especially in cultural milieus that the Neo-Kantians disliked: idealistic and religious, such as Eucken's circle; and artistic and sometimes reactionary, such as the groups gathering around Stefan George (1867–1933), that Simmel participated in, or the one gathering around the publisher Eugen Diederichs (1867–1930). The naturalization of man that Bergson seemed to be proposing in the *Évolution créatrice*, his pragmatist conception of scientific knowledge, his anti-intellectualistic idea of an intuition able to grasp the flux of life without mediations, and, last but not least, his manifest detestation of Kant made him, both in France and in Germany, a true *bête noire* of the Kantians.

Rickert also criticized the American pragmatists and, without naming them, Haeckel and Driesch. Hence, Rickert's essay constituted an attempt to put in their place all those who, from different perspectives, were trying to contest the disciplinary divisions existing in German academia. The targets were non-academic and anti-academic philosophers such as Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, academic philosophers advocating a non-academic practice of philosophy such as Bergson, and biologists with hegemonic ambitions, such as Driesch and Haeckel.

The "Plenitude of Life": Phenomenology and *Lebensphilosophie*

Scheler's manifesto for the philosophy of life should be interpreted as a strategic intervention in a debate polarized along two axes: on the one hand, by the tensions between mechanist biologists, such as Haeckel, and vitalists or holists, such as Hans Driesch and Jakob Johann von Uexküll (1864–1944); and, on the other hand, between philosophers and biologists. Scheler smartly picked up the expression used by Rickert, "philosophy of life." Because of the particular academic conjuncture of 1895–1910, the

25 Gregor Fitzi, *Soziale Erfahrung und Lebensphilosophie: Georg Simmels Beziehung zu Henri Bergson* (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 2002).

26 Caterina Zanfi, *Bergson et la philosophie allemande, 1907–1932* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2013).

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younger producers of philosophy, who were not likely to be published in scientific publications, were hosted in non-academic journals, and, therefore, they had to conform to the expectations of a different readership. Scheler published his essay in a literary journal, *Die weißen Blätter*, promoted an expression, "*Philosophie des Lebens*," which had been used at the end of the eighteenth century by non-academic authors, and used a literary and prophetic style. Finally, Scheler was presenting the philosophy of life not as a stable set of theories, but as a program inspired by three philosophers, Nietzsche, Bergson, and Dilthey, whose works had to be appropriated by the new generation. These three authors, who had never been in contact with each other, nonetheless had something in common: their reaction to positivism and to the mechanistic interpretation of the life sciences, and their hostility, or at least indifference, to Kantianism. They also shared a non-reductionist view of life as a phenomenon likely to be accessed through an inner experience. According to Scheler the "philosophy of life" was a philosophy springing "out of the plenitude of the experience of Life." The genitive "of" implied precisely that "life" had to be both the object and the subject of philosophy. But this "life" was not the life studied by biologists, but the pre-objective felt or "lived life" (*Erlebnis des Lebens*). By contrast, Scheler considered that the biologists were studying merely an objectified life or, in the case of Haeckel, a mechanized one. Therefore science needed a philosophy rooted in life "itself," namely in "lived life."

Now, the problem of life was not solvable without an anthropological framework likely to provide a stable a ground to justify philosophy's epistemological claims. That's the reason why, simultaneously with the "Versuche," Scheler published an essay, "Zur Idee des Menschen" ("On the Idea of Man," 1913), which provided the basis for his last and most famous book, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*. In his formulation of this theoretical framework Scheler was strongly influenced by Husserl's phenomenology, conceived as part of *Lebensphilosophie* too. This unusual usage of phenomenology was made possible by the Austrian philosopher's own philosophical development. Husserl, whose intellectual formation had taken place within the Austro-Hungarian academic system, which was strongly anti-Kantian, started using the concepts of *Erleben* and *Erlebnis* after his appointment at the University of Göttingen, in an environment very different from the Austrian one, marked by a fight between philosophers and psychologists over some university chairs. It is during this period that Husserl began reading his German colleagues and started

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responding to their critiques: He engaged with the Neo-Kantians, who accommodated his manifesto "Phenomenology as a Rigorous Science" in their journal *Logos*, but also with Eucken and Dilthey, from whom he picked up the language of "vitalism" and the concept of the *Lebenswelt*.[27] This concept appears only from 1917 onwards, when Husserl inherited the philosophy chair in Freiburg from Rickert after the latter's departure for Heidelberg.

It was phenomenology conceived as a "philosophy of life" that, according to Scheler, constituted the best candidate for giving an explanation of human knowledge and action and, thereby, for giving a new meaning to the concept of "value," the trademark of the Baden School. Phenomenology was the best candidate for replacing Neo-Kantianism. The philosophers of the Baden and Marburg Schools had been able, until then, to maintain the exceptionality of man amidst the natural world, and the exceptionality of philosophy amidst the disciplines.

To conclude, despite the sympathies that some philosophers had toward some biologists, and beyond the quarrels between different biologists – especially between the neo-vitalists, represented by Driesch, and the mechanists, represented by Haeckel – there was a clear conflict between the biologists, who were often close to the psychologists, and the "pure" philosophers. The dispute around psychologism which began around 1870, the *Psychologismus-Streit*, was therefore accompanied by a *Biologismus-Streit*, which gave birth to the "philosophies of life." These two disputes were largely resolved after World War I, when neo-Kantianism was slowly eclipsed and the "philosophy of life" assumed a renewed prominence.

Lebensphilosophie and Bio-politics

At the end of World War I, in the new Republic of Weimar, one of the dominant debates concerned the causes of the past four years of killings and destruction. The disastrous situation of postwar Germany provided the perfect sounding board for the spiritualist and even religious claims of certain philosophers, such as Eucken and Scheler, who, since the end of the nineteenth century, had been criticizing the supposed abstraction and inhumanity of the scientific rationality promoted by positivism and Neo-Kantianism, incarnated by industrialization and technical development, which they

27 For the philosophical appropriation of the concept of *Lebenswelt*, which appeared initially in the work of Haeckel, see Carl Bermes, *"Welt" als Thema der Philosophie: Vom metaphysischen zum natürlichen Weltbegriff* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2004).

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considered incapable of fostering moral progress.[28] The philosophers who had shown their fidelity to the nationalist cause during the war – when they opposed, in propagandist publications, the German "spiritual" *Kultur* to the French "materialistic" *Zivilisation* – were often able to gain a central spot on the intellectual scene. This applied to the case of Scheler, who – after having actively been engaged in the production of propaganda like his mentor Eucken[29] – had finally been hired by the University of Cologne.

At that moment, another "philosopher of life" was having an impressive success: Oswald Spengler. Even though Spengler did not present himself as a *Lebensphilosoph*, he clearly appeared as such to his readership. In his two-volume bestseller *The Decline of the West* (1919–1923) he classified societies as the naturalists were doing with organisms and, in the follow-up, *Man and Technics* (1931), explicitly subtitled *A Contribution to a Philosophy of Life*, he described technology as humanity's external organs. On the one hand, much like Nietzsche, his main inspiration along with Goethe, Spengler naturalized technique, science, morality and, in general, humanity. On the other hand, he used a non-scientific and "spiritual" notion of life, appealing to an extra-rational solution to the supposed crisis of civilization. *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* had a massive success, selling more than 100,000 copies within six years, but Spengler's position as an "independent scholar," and his despisal of academia blocked the breakthrough of his *Lebensphilosophie* inside the university. Both the phenomenologists and the Neo-Kantians wasted no opportunity to crucify *Lebensphilosophie* as irrational and politically dangerous: In 1920 there appeared both Rickert's *Das Philosophie des Lebens* and a whole issue of the journal *Logos* dedicated to a criticism of the now-fashionable "movement."

To be academically "presentable" *Lebensphilosophie* had to be turned into something else, namely a *philosophische Anthropologie*, and the best instrument to make this transformation possible was phenomenology. In the climate of general revolt against "abstraction" characteristic of the Weimar Republic, Scheler had been smart enough to present phenomenology as an intuitive and concrete philosophy (or "*Sachlichkeit*," following the Husserlian motto "*Zu den Sachen selbst*"), quite the opposite of Neo-Kantianism.[30] Thanks to phenomenology, "philosophy of life" survived as philosophical anthropology

28 See Paul Forman, "Weimar Culture, Causality, and Quantum Theory, 1918–1927: Adaptation by German Physicists and Mathematicians to a Hostile Intellectual Environment," *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences*, 3 (1971), 1–115.

29 See Kusch, *Psychologism*; and Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins*.

30 See Kusch, *Psychologism*.

in different forms, very biological (in the case of Arnold Gehlen), tied to psychopathology (in the case of Karl Jaspers and Ludwig Binswanger), or more historical and interested in the social sciences (in the case of Helmuth Plessner and Georg Misch).

In the 1930s, after the deaths of Dilthey (1913), Simmel (1918), and, finally, Scheler (1928), the jargon of life – which started circulating in the 1870s and had progressively invaded literature, philosophy, and political discourses – became an essential piece of the *völkisch* ideology promoted by the Nazi regime in publications such as *Gestalt und Leben* (1938) by Alfred Rosenberg (1893–1946). Nonetheless, it would be to say the least imprecise to speak of National Socialism's ideology as a "philosophy of life," and not only because "philosophy of life" wasn't a coherent set of discourses. Modern *Lebensphilosophie* emerged as a tool to save the practice of philosophy from its possible disappearance under the pressure of the life and human sciences. On the one hand, the critiques that some *Lebenphilosophen* addressed against the abstraction of "intellectualism" served as an appeal to "spiritual" forces that was easily appropriated by Nazi propaganda. On the other hand, the National Socialist discourses on "life" were connected with something apparently incompatible with this philosophy, namely the racial bio-politics inspired by a particular eugenic interpretation of social Darwinism.[31]

In many cases, similar theoretical positions – both philosophical and scientific – were followed by very different political choices, or the other way around. The cases of Ernst Haeckel, Helmuth Plessner, Arnold Gehlen, Hans Driesch, and Martin Heidegger are interesting. Despite his rationalism and mechanical reductionism, Haeckel supported German nationalism and imperialism; he was a social Darwinist and a eugenist, therefore his work was held in the highest respect by the Nazi ideologists. Both Plessner and Gehlen had been pupils of Scheler, and both of them were *philosophische Anthropologen*, but in 1933 their paths separated: While the first, of Jewish ancestry, had to flee Germany, the second had no compunction about taking Tillich's chair in Frankfurt, once the latter had been forced to retire by the authorities of the Third Reich. Despite the fact that some aspects of neo-vitalism[32] had been used by Nazi ideology, Hans Driesch was a strong

31 George L. Mosse, *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1980); George L. Mosse, *Nazi Culture: Intellectual, Cultural and Social Life in the Third Reich*, trans. Salvator Attanasio and others (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1966); and George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1998),

32 Anne Harrington, *Reenchanted Science: Holism in German Culture from Wilhelm II to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

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supporter of pacifism and universalism, which cost him his position.[33] Finally, Martin Heidegger, an active member of the Nazi Party since 1933, in a series of lectures of 1929 – later published under the title *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* – opposed both Driesch's and Uexküll's doctrines, and criticized his master Scheler's *Lebensphilosophie* for being a disguised form of "biologism."

During the late 1920s and the early 1930s, before the complete imposition of the Nazi ideology, many intellectuals in Germany expressed harsh critiques of *Lebensphilosophie*, from different points of view. They were often inspired by Rickert, who mentored, or at least influenced, German intellectuals as different as Martin Heidegger, Rudolf Carnap (1891–1970), and Max Weber (1864–1920). They criticized not only *Lebensphilosophie*, but also vitalism and holism in biology. This had been the case for Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945), the last adherent of the Marburg School, in *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen: Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis* (*The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms: Phenomenology of Knowledge*, 1929). This was also the case for the members of the neo-positivist circle of Vienna around Rudolf Carnap – Austrian philosophers such as Moritz Schlick (1882–1936), Philipp Franck (1884–1966), and Edgar Zilsel (1891–1944) – who followed the path taken by Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), who criticized "The Philosophy of Henri Bergson" and its "irrationalism" in the eponymous article he published in the 1912 issue of the journal *The Monist*. In the field of social philosophy, especially in the Marxist Frankfurt school, *Lebensphilosophie* was almost immediately treated as ideological, irrational, and, therefore, potentially dangerous.[34]

Post-structuralism: A "Philosophy of Life?"

In France the expression "*philosophie de la vie*" appeared for the first time during the 1920s, from the pen of the German-speaking philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch (1903–1985) to designate Bergson's, Simmel's, and Scheler's writings. In 1947 Georges Canguilhem remarked that the strong Cartesian heritage in France did not provide the conditions for the emergence of a "philosophy of life" and of a "biological philosophy" there during the

33 Harrington, *Reenchanted Science*.

34 Max Horkheimer's (1895–1973) review of Bergson's *The Sources of Morals and Religion*, "Zu Bergsons Metaphysik der Zeit," published in 1934 in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, György Lukács's (1885–1971) *The Destruction of Reason* (1955), Herbert Marcuse's (1898–1979) *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (1964), and Jürgen Habermas's *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985) all belong to this half-century-long Marxist tradition.

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nineteenth century.[35] During the interwar period, and even more so between 1945 and the mid 1960s, the heritage of the Neo-Kantian critiques of Bergson's philosophy (such as was addressed by René Berthelot in his famous book from 1911–1920, *Un romantisme utilitaire*), the association of *Lebensphilosophie* with Nazi ideology, the critiques that communist philosophers such as Georges Politzer (1903–1942) advanced against Bergson and many German philosophers, and the neat academic division between the humanities and the natural sciences blocked the breakthrough of *Lebensphilosophie*, which would later enter filtered through the prism of existential phenomenology. In most of cases – such as that of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) – French phenomenologists did not engage in a reflection on biological life and its relation with the human, conforming instead to the classic French Cartesianism. Only a few philosophers – such as Merleau-Ponty, in his *La structure du comportement* (*The Structure of Behavior*, 1942), and, later on, in his posthumously published lectures on *Nature* (1959–1961); Raymond Ruyer (1902–1987), in his book *Éléments de psychobiologie* (*Elements of psychobiology*, 1946); and Georges Canguilhem, in the *Le Normal et le Pathological* (1943) and in *The Knowledge of Life* (1952) – drew inspiration from Nietzsche and Scheler, and from German biologists and physicians such as Driesch, Uexküll, and Kurt Goldstein (1878–1965), with the aim of promoting a holistic and anti-mechanist view of life able to give meaning to the peculiarity of human behavior and cognition. Nonetheless, with the exception of Georges Canguilhem, these thinkers never used the expression "*philosophie de la vie*" or "*philosophie biologique*."

The works of these authors had a great importance for a new generation of thinkers who, during the 1960s, promoted a new interpretation of Nietzsche, used as a tool to read the socio-cultural context of the French Sixth Republic. The most important of them was, beyond any doubt, Gilles Deleuze (1905–1995), who published his seminal *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (*Nietzsche and Philosophy*) in 1961. Nietzsche's philosophy, conceived as an anti-subjectivist and anti-dialectical post-Kantian "philosophy of life," combined with the influence of Bergson and Spinoza, influenced the interpretation that Deleuze would later give of Marxism and psychoanalysis in the highly influential book he published with Félix Guattari (1930–1992), *L'anti-Œdipe: Capitalisme et Schizophrénie* (*Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1972). This work was the result of the new importance that the works of Freudo-

35 Georges Canguilhem, "Note sur la situation faite en France à la philosophie biologique," in *Résistance, philosophie biologique et histoire des sciences 1940–1965*, in *Œuvres complètes*, 5 vols. (Paris: Vrin, 2015), vol. IV, 307–320.

Marxists – especially Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957) and Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979) – had in France culture during the 1960s and especially in the aftermath of May 1968. *L'anti-Œdipe* not only tried to provide a critique both of Marxism and of psychoanalysis, but also combined the two in a synthesis centered around the concept of "productive desire." This notion was a means by which to criticize both consumerist society and the classic notion of desire as lack, which grounded psychoanalysis. In *L'anti-Œdipe* and in its 1980 companion text *Mille plateaux* (*A Thousand Plateaus*), Deleuze and Guattari constructed a philosophical system that looked like the ones produced by the *Naturphilosophen*, insofar as it considered "spirit" and "matter," culture and nature, as the static result of a productive desire prior to the all-too-human distinctions and dualisms. The effects of this work both inside and outside of France were impressive – Jean-François Lyotard's (1924–1998) *Libidinal Economy* (1974) was deeply influenced by it, and it stimulated a renewal of interest in authors such as Nietzsche, Bergson, and even Schelling.

During the 1960s, the French Nietzschean legacy not only had to make sense of the new social situation of postwar European society, but also had to deal with the recent developments in genetic biology. In 1970, in *The Logic of Life*, the French biologist and historian of the life sciences François Jacob (1920–2013) declared that life was "no longer interrogated in the laboratories." The following year, and more boldly still, his colleague Jacques Monod affirmed, in *Chance and Necessity*, that, while the secret of life had once seemed inaccessible, it was, by then, mostly solved. With such claims, the two scientists who, together with André Lwoff, had been awarded the 1965 Nobel Prize for their work on molecular biology, wished to emphasize the trend toward the reduction of biological phenomena to the laws governing the inanimate world. They interpreted life as a "code" or a "message" inscribed in every living being and reproduced through the self-copying of the DNA strand. Because the "question of life" was progressively fading away, it was no longer possible to consider the various versions of "vitalism" as viable orientations in biology or "philosophy of life" as a an acceptable orientation in philosophy. During the 1960s a "philosophy of biology" adopting a strictly analytical and anti-metaphysical approach emerged as an independent sub-discipline of philosophy of science.[36]

36 See for instance David L. Hull, *Philosophy of Biological Science* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1974); and David L. Hull, "Biology and Philosophy," in *Contemporary Philosophy: A New Survey, Volume 2: Philosophy of Science*, ed. Guttorm Fløistad (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), 281–316.

From the late 1960s onwards, it was the very concept of life itself that could sound useless, or at least could be seen as the inscription of a false problem. In 1966 Michel Foucault published *The Order of Things*, a book that sketched an "archeology of the human sciences." While Jacob and Monod claimed that life was a useless concept in biology, Foucault suggested that the historical transcendental, or *episteme*, which had dominated Western culture for 150 years was about to change. Together with "man," also "life" was destined to disappear.

In Foucault's visionary evocation of a future disappearance of man at the very end of *The Order of Things*, one can clearly hear the echo of Nietzsche's prophecy about the overcoming of man. But, just as in Nietzsche, the prophecy concerning the overcoming of man was essentially ambiguous. The notion of life was not about to disappear entirely: It was destined to go through mutations, in the life sciences as well as in the humanities.

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