

WORKSHOP ON KANT & BIOETHICS

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*The Philosophical Concept of Life and its Role in the Foundation of a
Non-reductionist Bioethics*

In my paper I will try to show that all actual attempts to deepen the idea of bioethics as a somewhat new philosophical discipline should return to the philosophical concept of life as developed by Kant and the German idealists. It was Kant who, starting from Cartesian presuppositions, ended up with a clear concept of the reflexivity of life and the systematic importance it bears for describing the philosophical totality – even if he didn't get to the point of reintroducing life in ontology. It was subsequently Fichte who showed that life is never something “external” to subjectivity but that, on the contrary, there is a fundamental identity between life, being and knowing – so that we may no longer exclude the idea of life from our ontologies but should rather change these ontologies according to the idea of life as *actual* being. It was finally Hegel who by referring to life overcame the last dualisms left over by Kant and who also revealed the dialectical structure of life: the “relational identity” of the general and the individual, the external and the internal, of object and subject in life – characteristics which allowed him to understand life as the *infinitum actu* and therefore also as the real unity between phenomena and their foundations, practical and theoretical thinking and so on.

In the final section of the paper I will try to show that the lesson taught by Kant and his followers should indeed allow us to avoid both: not only a reductionist understanding of bioethics which treats life and its manifestations solely as external “objects” but also a theory of bioethics which turns life into the only “substance” that matters and therefore is inclined to evaporate all so-called “anthropocentric” ethical claims like autonomy and freedom. If we can make clear that, on the one hand, life can never be reduced to mere “objectivity” which has to be treated according to external rules, and that, on the other hand, there is no real fundamental opposition between life and freedom, we might result in pointing out a real “paradigm shift” in bioethics – with bioethics itself becoming the model of a new way of a philosophically well-founded thinking in ethics.