

Problems*



1. Who is the subject of life?, i.e., who am I, Mr. So and So?
2. What is the meaning of the possessive word “my” in [expressions like] *my* body, *my* soul, *my* book, *my* things, and so on? [Where is] the line of demarcation between that which is mine and that which is not?
3. Why is it incongruous to place life—a life—in the world? Because the world in question belongs to my life, because it is the performative [*ejecutivo*] or absolute¹ world for me, while it is nothing of the sort for a life impervious to my world, for a life which, in no sense, is *found therein*.
4. The error or insufficiency of every form of idealism consists in proceeding on the basis of the [would-be fact that] the mind or consciousness reflects itself, on the grounds of *Selbstbewusstsein* [self-consciousness]. But there is no such thing as *Selbstbewusstsein*. An act performed by reflecting consciousness is not itself reflected; it is always other [than what is being reflected upon]. Therefore, there is neither an act of reflection properly so called nor anything like *one's self [sí mismo]*² either. Like anything that engages in objectivation, *Bewusstsein* [consciousness] severs itself from its object, whether the object in question is itself or something else. True “self-reflection” is given only in life. It is odd, indeed, that it be *possible* for the mind to reflect itself—a fact (?) on the basis of which phenomenology proceeds—and yet for it not to *have* to reflect itself, not to consist in doing so. Life is essentially self-reflection, and yet reflection is not just intellectual in nature; rather, it is, more generally, [life's] way of affecting itself. A belief, or a believing, not only succeeds in regarding itself, but in *believing*³ itself as well.
5. Phenomenology leaves out of consideration the performative character of an act, which is precisely what renders it a living act, rather than a

**Ed.'s N:* The set of notes bearing the title “Problems” seems [to have been] an exercise in reflection to be done before the course.

mere act (or fact). This is our novel theme: the performative character of every act.

6. Life is valid for itself—it is definitive, it is that which is definitive. It is the radical⁴ “reality” not just *for* philosophy; rather, it consists in being the absolute standpoint, since everything in it is absolute. *That which* someone else believes is for me something relative to him or her, but what I believe is absolute. If I were to apply as well to myself the relative character I attribute to my neighbor[’s life], I would thereby relinquish a vantage point that is living or vital;⁵ I would be turning my back on it and see everything as a *fact*,⁶ not as a performative finality. However, what I must do is the opposite: I must see my neighbor as an operative subject, that is to say, as I would see myself if I did not objectivate myself—in other words, [as I see myself] when I do not objectivate myself, when I live. Therefore, life is absolute always, and not just when or because it is *mine*. In ratiovitalism,⁷ I propound, over against any form of idealism, that the ego is not possessed of theoretical privilege of any kind.
7. Life is absolute positing [*posición*]. However, this must not be construed as if the absolute positing of life were a philosophical outcome. If that were the case, as any fact or *positum*⁸ considered as such, it would be relative. A fact or *positum* can be radical at best, never absolute. Life is absolute positing, and it is so not from a philosophical [point of view], but in itself, by nature. This character originates in the fact that life is performative and definitive for itself or in itself. If we make our way into life on the basis of that character, which is the one most evident to us, and seek to determine why life is absolute, we will discover that it is so because it is always *unique*: it is being, or what the unique one is. Now, the being of the unique one is having to be unique, having of absolute necessity to refer to itself (and to refer everything to itself); it is operative unicity (*werktätige Einzigkeit*).

[However,] the unique one is not the same as the *only one*, for there may be an infinite number of unique ones, each and every one of them being no less unique than the next.⁹ Yet, by the same token, the unicity of life renders it impervious, non-communicating, and exclusive. By virtue of its uniqueness, *my* life cannot—none of its parts can—belong to you or to anybody else. By reason of its uniqueness, it is altogether different from any other thing and any other life. My life is one of a kind, and this is true in such a radical sense that its *uniqueness* surpasses God’s unicity, inasmuch as the latter is not internal to God but [a determination] grounded in our own reasons. Only insofar as God were living would He be truly unique.

Hence, in ratiovitalism concepts are occasional.¹⁰ Accordingly, all lives are such because, in each one of them, *life* signifies a different reality, even if all their attributes, without exception, were the same. But to acknowledge this would force us to turn around the *principium identitatis indiscernibilium* [principle of the identity of indiscernibles]¹¹ and affirm the opposite, namely, the *principium de discernendo identico* [principle of the discernment of identicals].¹²

This points to the fact that, in ratiovitalism, concepts are indeed transcendent in character, since they themselves indicate how the logical laws having validity for them have no validity for the “real” which they [allow us to] think.

Life’s unicity is, therefore, its absoluteness.

Living is having to be unique.

Life’s being consists, first of all, in *having to be* and, secondly, in having to be *unique*.

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8. I am not certain yet whether life’s absolute positing is equivalent to its absolute existence; there is no doubt, however, that the latter is one of the sides of the former. To live is to exist absolutely. But this is not so as in the case of the Cartesian ego which exists *because* it thinks, that is to say, because thought exists;¹³ rather, to live is, non-mediate and by itself, to exist. Life, therefore, is endowed with existence in a more radical sense not only than the ego, but even than thought itself in Descartes’s system of ideas. It would be possible for thought not to exist because it is an object of mine, but it is not possible for life not to exist because life is not life insofar as it is an object of mine; rather, it is an object to the extent that thought¹⁴ thinks it as being a non-object for me, as being, instead, that which is for itself. Here one can clearly appreciate the novel way of looking at things proper to ratiovitalism. Life is the performative as such; therefore, regarded precisely as life, it is that which exists. It is not possible for the one living not to exist, because it is not possible, for itself, not to exist.

In accordance with our novel point of view or manner of looking at things, an object is defined not as it is for us, insofar as we are engaged in thinking of it, that is to say, as what it is objectively, but rather as what the object is for itself, as the subject of itself. Thus the existence of life does not signify here that it exists for us, but that it exists for and by itself.

But even this formulation proves insufficient, for my thesis is not that life exists for itself because it regards or encounters¹⁵ itself or, therefore, because it turns itself into its own object. To assert that would be to relapse into idealism. Life is not its objective existing for itself, but its active existing for itself. This is, in my judgment, a novel and radical turn of thought, because life is *Being for itself*. This, however, must not be construed as it was in idealism, in which Being = being an object, but rather by taking *Being as Be-ing*, Being as Entity, as entitative Being. One may understand this more clearly when one realizes that the Being of life is a *fashioning*¹⁶ or, better yet, a *self-fashioning*. The self-reflection belonging to everything vital is not intellectual in character or an objectivating sort of reflection, but an efficient, operative one; it is the [act of] *self-fashioning*, of carrying *itself* out, of *self-performance*, of self-endowment of being, of self-subsisting. That is why, strictly speaking, the idea of “positing” [or] “self-positing” is not valid, because in it activity is reduced to positing and [thus] presupposes the posited, as if the latter had a nature of its own apart from its being-positated. (Hence, the confusion and contradiction found in [the notion of] *Sich-selbstdenkende* [the one-thinking-itself-by-itself].)

Life *is for itself* because it is by its own effort; it is that which it makes of itself.¹⁷

9. Performativeness is the most evident character with which life, this novel reality, appears to us. Of it I say that it is performative in nature, that its being is performative being. Let me explain what I mean by that.

Performativeness is the note most suitable [to describe] something when it is in the nature of an act and is considered as such, that is to say, as carrying itself out, as fulfilling itself, as operative. Now then, [to say] that implies that it is possible to consider an act otherwise, in such a way that its being would not be [given to us as] performance. This other manner of consideration is one in which one does not refer to an act for what it is, *internally*, or as a performance taken *from within*, but rather as it makes its appearance before us, as it is, therefore, for another or from without.¹⁸ Accordingly, when one says of it that it is an act, one is saying something about it which it is not when it is being regarded *internally*. The act of seeing [for example] is not an act for itself; it is not cognizant of that because it is not engaged in reflecting upon itself; it does not see itself as an object or [as it would be] “from without.” In order to be clear to each other, let us then speak of the “internality” and “externality” of an act, or of its “internal” and “external” being.

We see then that the concept of performative being is formed in

contradistinction to that of objective being, and it must be understood as a function of and in reciprocity with it.

The act of regarding [something] *internally*, or in [terms of] its internal being, does not turn itself into its own object. What is more: *no act is capable of being its own object*. This is the reason why idealism is not cognizant of performative being, since it is based upon reflection, wherein an act is observed from [the standpoint of] another act. [Accordingly,] what is said of it [therein] is *just* that which the act shows of itself in such an alien consideration; the act shows just its external being.

On the other hand, what is the meaning of [speaking of] the *internality* or internal being of an act? Obviously, that which the act would be to an eye internal to it, what it would see if it saw itself.

But suppose that “seeing” is understood as usual or in the sense it normally stands for, namely, as an act of objectivating consciousness. One would then incur contradiction, for the meaning of objectivation, or “consciousness of,”¹⁹ is to stand outside of something and take it as the terminus of an act. The object of a conscious act is precisely that which the act is not; it is, instead, that at which the act terminates.

Performativeness, then, presupposes that an act *is for itself* and yet, at the same time, that this *being for me* does not signify the same as objectivation, or the consciousness properly so called that the act would have of itself.

*Being for itself*²⁰ is a category belonging to idealism, the one defining thought in its ultimate ontological peculiarity. Thought was presented as the only object for which to be an object is sufficient to be absolutely or to be real (= being *for itself* or *in itself*). It is odd indeed [to believe] that this feature of thought is not constitutive of it, even though it is so decisive for it and endows it with its ontological rank, but rather [to contend] that it must be *possible* for *the* “I think” to accompany all my representations,²¹ that is to say, that it must only be possible for it to do so. Reflection or self-consciousness is a possibility for thought, but it is not constitutive of it.

In idealism, apart from that strange situation, it is presupposed that thought or “consciousness” is peculiar in that, by its very nature, it would be at once *in itself* and *for itself*. Such a peculiarity would be responsible for its being, at once, an object for another and an absolute entity—in fine, for its being [both] performance and object. But it does not seem so; rather, the absolute or performative being of thought or consciousness is—ontologically speaking—neither more nor less distant from itself than anything else. Phenomenology—for which it would be so important to establish that point—only succeeds

in showing that there is continuity between the act engaged in reflecting and the act reflected upon, that is to say, that there is continuity between acts belonging to the same “mental stream” or *Bewusstseinsstrom*. Now, the mental stream transcends each act, and every act is at best continuous, but never identical, with another act, even the one immediately next to it. Hence, what is arbitrary about the *being for itself* of thought does not lie in the *being for*, but rather in the *itself*. There could be genuine self-reflection (and thus *one’s self* [*mismidad*]), only if an act reflected itself. But it so happens that it is not so: act *A* is endowed with external being for act *B*, but it is not possessed of internal being *for itself*. One must then subject the idea of “one’s self” and “being for itself” to correction.

Either a toothache hurts someone or it is no ache at all. The event of “hurting someone” is a “being for another,” and yet it is not so in the way of an object. My ache hurts me but not qua object of my consciousness or *cogitatio*; rather, it is absolutely and in itself as “it is engaged in being for me.” Its internal being is in no need of being turned into external being in order to be-for-me. Or equivalently stated: it is for me as engaged in being for itself. But the converse is true as well: its being for me is, at once and identically, being for itself. I may pay attention to it or not; I may observe it, think it, remember it—and all of that will yield to me its “being for me,” in the usual sense of objectivation. The ache I am thinking about does not hurt me, [however]; it is objectively, but *is* not performatively.

Here we have, then, a presence of being before me which is not of an objective sort, but rather of a straightforwardly entitative kind. Therefore, it is a reflection of the reality “ache” itself, one which is not endowed with the (already special) character of consciousness, but originarily constitutes that very reality. The said reflection is no mere possibility but something inseparable from the real, an indefeasible dimension of it, one that does not come to be superadded to it by my *cogitatio*.

Now then, that which I call “I” is present to me constantly and indefeasibly every moment. This is so much so that it makes me be what I am, that it indefeasibly forms part of my very existence. I am present to myself without having to perceive myself; on the contrary, when I perceive myself, my performative or inner I, my internal being is neither more nor less apparent than when I am not engaged in carrying out an “immanent” or “internal perception.” And just as this is true of the “I,” so it is too of each and every one of my “acts.” And just as it is true of my “acts,” so it is too of the entire “world” upon which they are usually directed. (Those “acts,” which are thus present to me, are not

the “acts” resulting from psychological objectivation, nor is my “I” the psychological one, but rather they are my *living* I and acts.)

Here we are dealing with the strange and unavoidable presence that life in its entirety is endowed with for the one who lives it, the presence in virtue of which only that which is possessed of it is part of my life (and, in consequence, of the real).

If by “me” one understands consciousness properly so called (and, therefore, a particular act thereof), then one may not say that the presence in question is an “act of reflection in me,” for the latter does not exist for me. In other words, such a presence is not, in turn, present to me.²²

That is the reason why one may say that to live or exist is, for me, to do so within a universal presence, the “subject” of which is not me, properly speaking. Rather, both I and the world participate in that presence. Reflection, then, is not in me (= consciousness), but a “reflection in itself” of everything. The reality called *life* is the realm of reflection in itself, wherein everything is “engaged-in-being-for-itself” absolutely. *I* am not the locus in which reflection occurs; rather, I find myself, as a matter of course, immersed therein, as it were, in a medium of light. Life is self-illuminating, and everything in it is possessed of self-illumination, of self-luminosity.