

Review of: "[Commentary] From the Non-Living to the Death"

Wojciech Cwalina

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This speculative study posits that life and death are two sides of one and the same process. The authors present three arguments, which they treat as heuristics. My impression is that, despite this speculative nature, the ideas they present are under-considered. They are also not related to the rich philosophical, psychological, or cognitive science literature.

My main reflection is that the main problem is defining the concepts they use. It's not only about life (spelled with "L" and "I"), but - above all - about the concept that is crucial for the authors: "the universe." I don't know what the authors mean by this term. Is "the universe" something like a living organism? Or something that is the essence of Lovelock's "Gaia hypothesis"? The approach to the three speculations developed in the text largely depends on the definitions adopted.

The first speculation is that existence is the strategy by which the universe manifests itself, and that the first tactic for activating this strategy is the simultaneity between life and non-life. In developing this hypothesis, the authors provide the example of a "stone." But is it accurate? If we assume that nature ("the universe"?) consists of animate and inanimate objects, then considerations about whether a stone is "dead" or once "lived" are idle. It all depends on the perspective from which you approach the question: "Is the non-living dead?" For example, if "the universe" is alive, are all its elements (understood, e.g., in systems theory) also alive? I have the impression that asking this type of question may be interesting, but it is also a "dead end."

The second hypothesis posits that consciousness is a stance of the living experience, or more specifically, "Life and consciousness are linked, yet they are not identical. Life is defined by the material components that sustain it, whereas consciousness is a non-material phenomenon that emerges from living processes." This speculation seems quite obvious. The results of many philosophical and cognitive (and neurocognitive) analyses regarding consciousness seem to be largely consistent with the authors' hypothesis. It brings nothing new.

The third hypothesis asserts that "we are simultaneously alive and dead, but that we remain more time alive than dead. This is why we have the impression that we are alive." Its development is based on an analogy to percolation in petroleum engineering. For me, this analogy is very distant and unclear. I am convinced that references to, for example, physics or chemistry when analyzing consciousness or life-non-life are valuable. Their heuristic value is considerable, which was brilliantly demonstrated many years ago by Prigogine and Stengers in the book "Order out of chaos: Man's new dialogue with nature."

The article is certainly provocative. However, in my opinion, it requires clarification of the concepts used by the authors. It would also be valuable to place the speculations they presented in a broader scientific context. This would allow for their ideas to be clarified and sharpened, as well as for stronger arguments in their favor.

