The Path of Life: From Life at the Center to a Dynamic Ontology and a Science for Good Living

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Abstract. The question of life resists reduction: the more it is dissected into mechanisms, the farther we often move from its meaning. This essay argues that life should be understood as a path: an inwardly directed process — an unfolding of potential governed by formal, teleological principles — rather than as a set of inert biochemical facts. Drawing on Aristotle's notion of *psyche* and *entelechy*, Hans Driesch's embryological findings, and contemporary critiques of mechanistic science and capitalist life-organization, the essay proposes an epistemic and ethical reorientation: to know life we must listen to life's language (feeling, direction, sense) and restore conditions that enable its flourishing. To operationalize this reorientation, the essay advances *Euzoology* — a life-centered science for a good living — which unites formal teleology, developmental dynamics, and an ethics of dwelling. Euzoology reframes questions of biology, social organization, and policy around the criteria of flourishing, coherence, and participation. The path of life is therefore both a philosophical discovery and a programmatic call: to recover forms of existence and knowledge that allow life to realize its intrinsic ends.

1 Life as the Question of Questions

Every inquiry begins in life, yet life itself seems to elude inquiry. What we call knowledge is an activity of the living, a gesture through which life seeks to know itself. To ask what life is, then, is to ask from within the very phenomenon we seek to understand. Unlike any other object of study, life does not stand opposite the observer; it includes and sustains the observer as part of its own movement.

Modern thought has often overlooked this circularity. It has treated life as an external domain—something to be described by physics, chemistry, or information theory. But in doing so, it has forgotten that life is not something *to* be known, but rather that through which knowing becomes possible. Life is not an *object* of thought; it is the *condition* of thought. To know life, one must live it—to think is already to participate in the unfolding of being.

This paradox—life as both the subject and object of knowledge—marks the deepest horizon of philosophy and science alike. It reveals that to understand life is not merely to accumulate data, but to recover a mode of participation lost in the abstractions of modernity. The question of life is thus the question of our own being.

The question about life precedes reflection, accompanies experience, and resurfaces whenever events crack our certainties. Life is, in its essence, what emerges within us in every instant—an inward movement that is not reducible to external happenings. Yet the tendency is to equate life with circumstances: the events, systems, and pressures that shape our days. In one sense this is true—circumstances enable or prevent our becoming. When they prevent it, suffering follows.

Underlying our actions is a desire to realize ourselves, to become what we are in potential. That desire gives direction, purpose, and meaning; it is the animating pulse through which life speaks. Life rewards us with harmony when our activity aligns with our potential, and it marks misalignment with pain. This language—feelings and orientation—is the first place where life manifests itself.

2 The Limits of the Mechanistic View

Modern science, since its rise in the 16th-17th century, has achieved immense power by dissecting, measuring, and analyzing the world. But when this method is applied to life itself, something fundamental is lost. Life is not an object among others; it is the subject of all experience. To place it under the microscope is to remove it from the very context that makes it living.

We say, for example, that "dopamine is the happiness hormone" or that the "reward system" explains our joys and motivations. These expressions reduce the interiority of life to mere biochemical processes. They assume that once we name the molecular mechanism, we have understood the phenomenon. Yet the more we explain, the less we seem to understand. The mystery remains, because what is truly alive eludes the gaze that tries to dominate it.

Life, when observed through the dissecting lens, is already dead. Its spontaneity has vanished. The heart that beats on the table of the physiologist no longer beats with meaning. Thus, the mechanistic language of modern biology — so effective for controlling and manipulating — becomes a language that cannot speak of the living.

To approach life as life, another mode of knowing is required: one that does not stand outside of life but participates in it. A knowledge that is not only analytical but also contemplative — not only descriptive but also attuned to the inner form of things.

3 Aristotle: Psyche, Form and End

If dissecting life kills it, how can life be known? Aristotle confronted this difficulty by refusing to equate life with mere composition. Despite the depth of his anatomical investigations, when defining the living he appealed to *psyche*. He defined the *psyche* [ψυχή] as "the principle [ἀρχή] of a living being [ζῷον]" (1, 402a6) and as "a substance [οὐσία] in the sense of form [εἶδος] of a natural [φυσικός] body [σῶμα] that has life

[ζωή] potentially [δύναμις]" (1, 412a19).

For Aristotle, then, the *psyche* is not a separate substance or a ghostly entity, but *the form and principle of organization of the living being* — the actuality of a body that possesses life potentially (3). The *psyche* is the inner cause that makes a body a living body. It is not added from outside but unfolds from within.

This led him to identify life with *entelechy* [ἐντελέχεια] — *that which carries its own end within itself*. Every living being exists for the sake of realizing its form. Life, in this sense, is *teleological*: its meaning lies not in its material composition but in its *purposefulness*, in *what it strives to become*.

In the living being, *form and purpose coincide*. The acorn becomes the oak not because external forces push it there, but because the oak is already implicitly contained within it as possibility. Life is a movement from potentiality to actuality — from what can be to what is.

4 Driesch: Morphogenesis, Manifoldness and Entelechy

More than two millennia later, Hans Driesch, through his experiments in embryology, rediscovered the truth of Aristotle's insight. In the late nineteenth century, he observed that when the cells of a sea urchin embryo were separated, each one could develop into a complete organism (2). This observation contradicted the mechanistic idea that each part of the embryo had a fixed and local destiny.

Driesch realized that the organism behaves as a whole that cannot be explained by the sum of its parts. The form of life emerges from within, guided by *an internal principle that transcends mechanical causality*. He called this organizing principle *entelechy*, borrowing the Aristotelian term.

For Driesch, the entelechy was not a mystical force but an empirical reality — *an intensive, non-spatial manifoldness* responsible for the coordination and regulation of living processes. Morphogenesis, he showed, is not the result of physical pushes and pulls, but of *a formative causality immanent to life itself*.

Thus, life once again appeared as autonomous, as *an activity guided by internal purpose*. Driesch's work restored teleology to the heart of biology, not as metaphysical speculation but as experimental fact. Yet, his ideas were soon marginalized by a scientific world increasingly committed to materialism and reductionism.

5 Life as Project and Sense

If life contains its own end within itself, then it is not merely *being* — it is *becoming*. Life is always more than what it is; it is what it is becoming. In every living being, there is a tension between actuality and potentiality, between what has been realized and what remains latent.

This tension gives rise to *sense*. The etymology of the word "sense" (Latin *sentire*, to feel; Proto-Indo European *sent*, to move toward) reveals this link: *sense is direction, orientation, the feeling of a path. To live is to move toward one's fulfillment; to feel is to sense the way*.

When life loses its direction, it collapses into two opposite forms of alienation: *randomness*, in which everything is indifferent, and *determinism*, in which everything is fixed. Both deny the inner freedom of life — its capacity to choose its path.

Human beings, too, participate in this teleological structure. When we cease to unfold our own potentialities, we become instruments of another's purpose. We live a life that is not ours. The great danger of the mechanistic worldview is precisely this: it makes us prisoners of our own constructions, reducing our existence to an external mechanism that we no longer command.

6 The Path of the Lifeless: Capitalism as an Alienated Life Organizational Form

Our current mode of existence—the capitalist mode—is not merely an economic model; it is a mode of organizing life itself. It is what I call a *life organizational form* (7). Capital constitutes rhythms, priorities and institutions that shape desires, time, attention, work and relations. Where life's inner ends once oriented behavior, external metrics of productivity and accumulation now do. Life itself has been subordinated to production and accumulation. Today, the fundamental inversion is clear: *we do not live to produce, but produce to live* — yet society functions as if the opposite were true.

This inversion is not merely economic; it is *ontological*. The crisis of modernity, ecological and spiritual alike, stems from this inversion. *Capitalism is a mode of organization that treats life as raw material for the self-reproduction of capital*. It consumes the living to sustain the non-living. The result is that markets are "free" while people increasingly live as subjected units within production systems. Freedom, in its existential sense, is displaced by market freedom.

The rules of capitalism are those of Darwinism: *competition*, *struggle for existence* and *the survival of the fittest* are the natural forces that drives people into the *path of the lifeless*. The association between capitalism and Darwinism is not coincidental, but epistemic: they are part of the same *ideological matrix of science* (5). For this reason, we could speak of a *Capitalist Darwinism*.

7 Returning to the Path of Life

To heal this rupture, we must return to the *path of life* — the path of existence that seeks harmony between being and becoming. This path does not deny reason or science; it restores them to their proper place within life. Knowledge must serve the unfolding of life, not the domination of it.

To reclaim the path of life is therefore not merely to critique economics but to reorient life organizational forms toward conditions that allow life to realize its intrinsic ends. To rediscover the path of life is therefore to reclaim freedom for life — not the abstract freedom of the market, but the concrete freedom to live according to one's nature, to unfold one's potential in communion with others and with the Earth. To return to the path of life we need a new science.

8 Euzoology: A Science for a Good Life

What is required today is not merely a new economy, but *a new science of life* — one that studies the conditions of flourishing rather than the mechanisms of control. This is what we may call *Euzoology* (from *eu*, good; *zōé*, life): a *science for a good life*.

Euzoology would not oppose biology but complete it. While biology describes life as an object, Euzoology would study life as a subject — as the inner striving of beings to realize themselves. It would investigate the *modes of existence* that favor vitality, creativity and freedom, both individual and collective.

Such a science would begin by *re-empowering life*, freeing human beings from the subordination to economic systems that exploit their vital energies. The economy should serve life, not the reverse. Modern civilization has confused efficiency with value, submission with order. Originality, spontaneity and difference — the very signs of life — are often punished rather than cultivated.

A true science for a good life would study how forms of life organize themselves to maximize freedom and fulfillment. It would unite ethics, ecology and epistemology into a single inquiry: *How should we live so that life itself can continue to unfold?*

Euzoology

What Euzoology is:

- A transdisciplinary science that treats organisms and communities as purposive, formative systems.
- A field that integrates developmental biology, systems thinking, phenomenology of feeling and normative inquiry about modes of living.
- A practical science: it informs design of institutions, policies and social architectures that promote flourishing.

Core principles of Euzoology:

1. **Immanence of form:** the formative principles that organize living beings are immanent and must be studied as such.
2. **Participatory epistemology:** investigators are not detached observers but participants; methods include attentive description, developmental interventions guided by life-centered aims, and systemic modeling that preserves purposive coherence.
3. **Criteria of flourishing:** success is evaluated by life-centered metrics—coherence, resilience, freedom for self-unfolding—rather than solely by efficiency, GDP or production.
4. **Ethical grounding:** Euzoology links knowledge with the imperative to nurture conditions for life, *bridging the descriptive and the normative*.

Why Euzoology matters:

- It addresses the blind spot of mechanistic science: how to interpret and respond to purposive aspects of development and behavior.
- It offers tools to design institutions (economic, educational, ecological) that orient toward life-fulfilling ends.
- It reframes policy debates: rather than ask "How can we extract more?", Euzoology asks "How can we enable more flourishing?"

Euzoology is thus not a return to uncritical mysticism but a rigorous program: formal concepts (entelechy, form), empirical practices (developmental experiments, systemic mapping), and normative commitments (life as the central good) converge into a science for living well.

9 Life Organizational Forms for the Good Life

To understand life is also to understand *the forms through which it organizes itself*. Every organism, every society, every culture embodies a certain organization of life — a way in which potentiality becomes form. But not every organization serves life equally. Some structures, like rigid bureaucracies or exploitative economies, inhibit life's unfolding.

We must therefore study and design *life organizational forms* that favor autonomy, creativity and communion. The belief that greater organization automatically brings better life is false. Many of the most "efficient" systems are also the most dehumanizing.

The Fordist and Taylorist models, based on the *mechanization of labor and time*, have shaped not only industry but also consciousness. They turned living work into mechanical repetition, and human beings into replaceable parts. In such a system, the unfolding of life is stifled.

To liberate life, new organizational forms are needed — ones that place *life itself at the center* (4). These forms would not impose uniformity but cultivate diversity, not competition but cooperation, not control but care. The task of Euzoology is to study and create these new forms of living organization, both biological and social, that allow life to flourish in all its dimensions.

Euzoology suggests studying and experimenting with organizational forms that:

- center autonomy and the possibility of following one's path;
- cultivate cooperative rather than purely competitive dynamics;
- value diversity of life-styles and modalities of contribution;
- prioritize care, maintenance and reproduction of life (social, ecological, cultural) over mere accumulation.

This approach requires a shift in success metrics: coherence, ecological connectedness and capacity for self-realization become primary indicators.

10 Returning to the Path: Practical and Epistemic Steps

Restoring the path of life involves both intellectual and practical remedies:

- **Epistemic:** broaden scientific method to include participatory and formative approaches; embrace conceptual tools (form, entelechy) that capture purposive dynamics; recognize limits of reductionism.
- **Institutional:** reorient education, labor and governance to prioritize conditions for flourishing; design experiments in communal living, decentralized decision-making and ecosystems stewardship.

• **Personal/Cultural:** *cultivate sensitivity to life's language*—feelings as signals of resonance or dissonance—and strengthen practices that reconnect people to their unfolding (care, craftsmanship, ecological immersion).

Euzoology plays a coordinating role: it translates teleological insight into research programs, policy recommendations and design principles.

11 Conclusion: Science as Life Thinking Itself

To walk the path of life is to recognize that the question "What is life?" is inseparable from the question "Who are we?" Life is not the object of thought but its origin, not a riddle to be solved but a mystery to be lived.

In this recognition lies the beginning of a new epoch of thought—an *Eutopian* mode of existence in which knowing, living and being are again one (6). The path of life is thus not a concept but a calling: the invitation for humanity to return to the source from which both thought and world unfold—the living unity of existence itself.

The path of life is a summons to align knowledge and existence with the living world's inner law. The classical insight—*psyche* as form, entelechy as end-within—remains critical because it situates purpose inside life rather than outside it. Driesch's experiments underscore that purposive coordination is empirically present in development. *The modern mechanistic turn provided immense power but at the cost of an impoverished understanding of life*. Euzoology restores balance: it asks scientific rigor to harmonize with the ethical imperative to sustain living forms.

Walking the path of life involves restoring freedom in its existential sense—freedom to unfold, to pursue one's internal ends, to participate in a living cosmos. It means reorganizing our institutions so that they serve life rather than subordinate it, and it requires a science that can both explain and ethically guide that transformation. This is the program of Euzoology and the practice of returning to the path of life. It is no longer just about *putting life at the center* (4), but about *walking the path of life*.

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DOI: https://www.evolutio.ar/id/EJ62923036

How to cite

Ostachuk, A. (2025). The Path of Life: From Life at the Center to a Dynamic Ontology and a Science for Good Living. *Evolutio Journal*. 2025: EJ62923036.

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