

INTRODUCTION

A Concept Note

Clara Han and Veena Das

Dōgen, a thirteenth-century Buddhist scholar from Japan, provocatively reversed the commonsense notion of life and death, which takes birth as the inception of a linear stretch of time over which a particular life is lived and death as the moment of cessation of that time. Instead, he thought that within Buddhist practice and hence within each moment, life and death can be seen as working together. What if we took such ways of conceptualizing the relation between life and death as present not only in exotic practices but also in concepts generated from the experiences of everyday life and its perils? Then we could become attentive to the multiple forms in which human societies generate understanding of life that comes from their varied experiences of how living and dying have been transformed in our contemporary conditions. This book is conceived as a response to the idea that our concepts are honed from the everyday experiences to which the people we study struggle to give expression, and to the idea that we ourselves become apprentices to death as we survey the altered landscape on which life and death become conjoined in our contemporary world. Our intention in this introductory chapter is not to summarize the chapters that follow: the section introductions show how the particular chapters in each section take forward the ways in which life and death are folded together in the lives of individuals and communities. Here we want to reflect on how anthropological conceptions of life have absorbed the discussion of these issues from philosophy and from the history of medicine even as the anthropological attention to the concreteness of lives and deaths has put pressure on the abstract formulations of these other disciplines. We do not intend to treat philosophy as anthropology's theory any more than

we claim to provide empirical evidence for the abstract theorization of philosophers: rather, we hope to trace the multiple paths that we want to keep open for anthropological explorations in the investigation of life and how it is conjoined to death in specific, concrete ways.

Recent attempts in the anthropology of medicine (or medical anthropology), as well as science and technology studies, have made impressive gains in understanding how the emergence of the biopolitical state, neoliberal restructuring of markets, globalization, and advances in biology have shifted the emphasis from society as an object of study and reform to life as an object of study and reform. Yet, narrowing down the notion of life to biological life alone has drawn a boundary between more classical questions about life, including those from within an anthropology of religion on the impulse to regeneration within the rituals of death and of sacrifice (see Bloch and Parry 1982; Puett 2004) and the so-called new questions that assume that unless the prefix *bio-* can be added to a concept, that concept becomes irrelevant to our contemporary conditions. Might we reposition anthropology to ask such questions as: What description would be adequate to our sense of life and even reality as precarious or fragile? What is it for a human being to be awakened to his or her existence? What is it for humans to have a life in language? What is the relation between cultural differences expressed in notions of context, milieu, and disposition that bind us to our culture and the impulse toward criticism, skepticism, or denial of the connections that might create positive energies toward reform or secrete destructive impulses that drain life out of our relations, making them ghostly or spectral? How do attachment and detachment, trust and skepticism, between those who are close or distant, or between the human and the inhuman, play out at different thresholds of life? Do the critique of humanitarianism and the taken-for-granted assumptions about the human that privilege sentimental connections exhaust the possibilities of the anthropological impulse to respond to suffering? How can we rethink notions of the ideal, the normal, and the pathological?

It is not our claim that such questions are completely absent from the recent magisterial anthologies in medical anthropology. Yet we may ask how the very impulse to put these texts within the subdiscipline of medical anthropology or of science and technology studies tends to create the idea of these subdisciplines as fully constituted domains of inquiry, which then try to establish relations with other such subdisciplines as anthropology of religion and linguistic anthropology (e.g., Briggs 2004). We are curious as to how the notion of life and what is asked in relation to living and dying may be subtly shaped by assuming these boundaries. Why are “ethics” and “politics” marked out as domains separate from each other and from everyday life, for instance? What if these boundaries were not there in the first place?¹ Is the impulse to carve a different domain for medical anthropology also a way of acknowledging the dominance of public health and medicine?

The rest of this introduction is organized as follows: We first take issue with recent work that has privileged the power of biology to generate “newness” in contemporary social life. The mystery, we suggest, is how newness comes to be embedded in older

forms even as it transforms them. Instead of seeking to find what is common to all in the form of a general theory of biopower, we take three complexes—biosecurity and biopolitics in relation to the colonial order; the varied ways in which identity and existence are tied to each other in the politics of recognition around biological conditions; and the sites of scientific knowledge production in relation to the search for cure—to examine both the ways in which newness is embedded in older forms of politics and sociality, and the varied ways in which the biological and social come to be inflected in each other. We reflect on the ways in which the demand for recognition may surpass the framework of rights liberalism relied on in recent work on biological citizenship and biosociality.

Second, we ask how attention to the singular living being might shift our understanding of this mutual absorption of the natural and social. If norms are part of the way in which the body is experienced, in what way might newness be born in the world? While the concept of local biologies has contributed much to unsettling any universal idea of biology, we suggest that the particular way in which it deploys the idea of contextualization tends to emphasize the production of regularities. We turn to philosopher and historian of science Georges Canguilhem to suggest that his thoughts on individuality as that which is precariously achieved through enormous effort may be helpful in seeing context in an entirely different light. Canguilhem asks us to pay attention to the relation of living being and milieu—neither of which is held constant. Yet we also suggest that Canguilhem's commitment to retrieving the vital from mechanism may lead him to take the human as a rather stable entity, clearly differentiated from other organisms through the customs, social organization, and technologies that only "man" partakes in. How might we attend to the fragility of life, in the sense of a *human* form of life?

We respond to this question in the third section by giving sustained attention to the nuances of the expression "form of life," which Wittgenstein introduced as an ordinary expression and not as a conceptual schema. The expression "form of life" helps us see language not as linguistic philosophy does—as *about* language—but rather as human beings' life *in* language. Cavell's (1989) analysis of the two separate dimensions of the expressions *form* and *life* and Das's (2007) elaboration of the idea of *naturalness* in terms of the acts and expressions that belong to our lives as humans—rather than, say, to what is natural for birds or animals—help us see the two aspects of the expression form of life as nestled in each other: sociocultural differences, or the form that human existence takes, as well as the way in which the social and the natural mutually absorb each other. We come to see that a form of life rests on nothing more but nothing less than that we agree or find ourselves agreeing to a life together. As such, agreement in a form of life is not a matter settled once and for all but must be secured through the work on the everyday.

The fragility that marks our agreements reveals not just how our experience is opaque to us but also the precarious nature of reality. Thus the ideas of limit and of thresholds are integral to the ways in which life is reconstituted. The notion of limit then becomes the point at which the natural and the social come apart. Shifting our attention to varying

intensities and the waxing and waning of force through which life is reconstituted, on the other hand, offers a possibility that something new might emerge to sustain life (Singh 2014). We thus suggest, as the chapters in this book beautifully demonstrate, that embracing an idea of life and death that goes beyond the notions of the biological (even while including it) may help anthropology be genuinely open to pathways for reimagining human life as the mutual absorption of the natural and the social and the fragility with which they come to be aligned.

THE TRAFFIC BETWEEN BIOPOWER AND LIFE

In a series of essays, Didier Fassin (2009; 2014) proposed the term *politics of life* in order to highlight the elusiveness of life in Michel Foucault's work on biopolitics and to draw attention to what politics concretely does to life in terms of the simultaneous assertion of the sacredness of life as an abstract concept and the differential valuation of concrete lives in the actual institutional practices of modernity. Through an acute analysis, Fassin takes issue with a widely held view that Foucault's concept of biopower and his subsequent work on biopolitics take as their object "life itself." As is well known, Foucault elaborated biopolitics through a detailed description of how population emerged as a biological reality independent of individual lives through the application of statistical reasoning in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France (Foucault [1975–76] 2003; [1977–78] 2007). As a technology of power distinct from mechanisms of discipline, which sought the individual's conformity to the norm, biopolitics was the "control of life and the biological processes of man-as-species and of ensuring that they are not disciplined, but regularized"—a regulation made possible through "statistics, forecasts, and overall measures" (Foucault [1975–76] 2003).

Foucault's analysis of the regulation of the population, or the efforts to intervene in the vital characteristics of "man-as-species," spurred a whole gamut of terms in anthropology that took *bio-* as a qualifier: biosociality, biological citizenship, biocapital, and bioavailability, to name a few. Yet, as Fassin points out, those working within the tradition of Foucault have tended to take the notion of life as that which is defined by biological knowledge alone. We may here note a curious divide in anthropology between an impulse to see life as an object of intervention and a biological reality that is regularized through deliberate actions grounded in biological knowledge and statistics on the one hand, and an impulse to see life as a complex entanglement of norms, customs, and practices that escape this regularization on the other. While we are in agreement with the idea that the social is not the ground of all being, as well as with the need to question the givenness of biology as that which underwrites societal variation, the questions that arise from the dual notion that life needs forms but that forms are not pure human constructions are so difficult that most discussions fall into the known divisions between the given and constructed or the conventional and the natural. Even such issues as those of finding adequate ways of *describing* the entanglement of the natural and the social need more

elaboration: Wittgenstein asks us to *look and see*, and not to just *think*, what is common between, say, two kinds of games, and he tells us that what we find is not something common to all games but, rather, relationships, overlaps, and series—what he also called family resemblances (Wittgenstein 1953, paras. 66, 67). We shall take precisely such an idea forward in our understanding of the modifier *bio-* not by examining what is common to all forms of biologically mediated life but by looking at three such constellations of the biological with the social.

Scholars in science and technology studies and in the anthropology of biomedicine acknowledge that human life entails the mutual inflection of the biological and the social, and that neither is reducible to the other. However, there is a tendency to privilege developments in the biological sciences and informatics as generating “newness” in contemporary social life, thereby introducing a kind of evolutionary thinking through which it is assumed that biology is the new motor of history and that its power to reshape life will be replicated in time in all societies, too.² According a privileged place to biology in the form of synthetic biology (Rabinow 2011) or neurosciences (Ramachandran 2012; Varela 1999) as the site of “the new” tends to overlook connections to older forms of socialities and their power to redefine the shape that biology will itself take. The presumption of a “we,” while clearly constructed in a particular site (usually Europe or North America), is often generalized to all sites of the world, assuming a linear development that will replicate the existing structures in the West. In some ways such a formulation re-creates all the assumptions of modernization theory on convergence that were the subject of stringent critiques in the late twentieth century.³

In what follows, we take three complexes with which to look at the mutual imbrications of the biological and the social: biosecurity and biolgitimacy in relation to colonial orders and the securing of European identity; the politics of recognition in relation to biological conditions; and the sites of scientific knowledge production in relation to the search for cure. Our discussion here is not so much a wholesale rejection of science and technology studies as it is the voicing of a caution: neither do developments in biological sciences make older forms of politics redundant, nor is it easy to locate newness as if it were a complete rupture from the past. Rather, as the ancients formulated the mystery of time: How can something that exists bring about something that is other than itself, as newness? Or, put differently, What is the relation between situation and event?

In his lectures “Security, Territory, Population,” Michel Foucault elaborates how the mechanism of security emerges in concert with the idea of the population in eighteenth-century Europe. The population, which he calls a “thick natural phenomenon,” allows for the transition from classificatory identifications of natural history to the regularities, mutations, and eliminations of biology (Foucault [1975–76] 2003, 63–64). But what does the “naturalness” of the population signify? Foucault argues that this naturalness rests on the regularities that can be discerned even in accidents, the universal of desire—understood as the pursuit of the individual’s interest—which “regularly produces the benefit of all,” and a number of modifiable variables on which this desire depends (74).

Technologies of security seek to transform those regularities into those considered more “favorable”—what Foucault calls “normalization.” Consider variolation for smallpox. Through artificially inoculated disease, future cases can be prevented, thus allowing for “the progressive self-cancellation of phenomena by the phenomena themselves” (66). Government of the population, then, involves the deployment of “reflected procedures”—calculations of risk and identifications of dangers, but also the fears, prejudices, and opinions of a public, which can be got hold of through campaigns and education. Yet we may ask: How are these internal dangers discerned? Does normalization necessarily follow such discernment, and if so, in relation to whom, and in what registers of social life? Do technologies of security necessarily entail deliberate action on the basis of categories that are settled in advance?

In her classic work on race, sexuality, and empire, Anne Stoler both extends and shows the limits of Foucault’s concept of biopower, in that it was constructed primarily with regard to a history of European sexuality and to state racism within the boundaries of a Europe largely extricated from its embeddedness in empire (Stoler 1995). Of particular interest to us is her finely tuned discussion of how internal dangers to European society came to be constituted through the entanglement with colonial settlement. Instead of relying on a picture of colonialism as simply the exportation of secure ideas of European supremacy and the bourgeois self, Stoler demonstrates how a pervasive anxiety over the security of the European population was expressed not only in relation to a clearly demarcated other, but perhaps more so in relation to mixed-blood children and destitute white colonial settlers who would be legally identified as European but threatening to European identity as such. That is, European identity came to be forged through threats that were dubiously internal. Stoler argues that in colonial orders, “the concept of a ‘population’ did not substitute for a ‘people’: both conceptions represent state-building and nation-building projects in which a racial grammar tying certain physical attributes to specific hidden dispositions played a crucial role” (1995, 39).

Thus, extending Foucault’s concern not “with modern racism’s break with earlier forms, but the discursive *bricolage* whereby an older discourse of race is ‘recovered, modified, encased and encrusted’ in new form” (Stoler 1995, 61), Stoler examines the ways in which vulnerabilities of the bourgeois colonial project were given expression and shored up, particularly in the domain of sexuality and the domestic: “management and knowledge of home environments, childrearing practices, and sexual arrangements of European colonials were based on the notion that the domestic domain harbored potential threats both to the ‘defense of society’ and to the future ‘security’ of the [European] population and the [colonial] state” (96). The harried efforts in discerning these vulnerabilities demonstrate the instability and flux of who or what was to be defended: defense was forged through responses to anxieties over securing whiteness and bourgeois respectability, yet their nature, too, was being forged. These anxieties found a potent locus in the presumed vulnerability of children’s sexuality, which could be deformed

through subjection to “tropical circumstances and/or to those of native or impure blood” (156).

Bringing into focus the nervousness with which colonial regimes attempted to discern mobile internal dangers and to purify them from the social body shows us the way in which projects to secure the health of the population are embedded in older racial discourses of blood and forms of sociality on which colonial rule rested, such as slavery and forms of domestic servitude. And further, it illuminates how technologies of security are mediated by anxieties surrounding these older formations and discourses, such that the “naturalness” of the population is penetrated not just by agents and techniques at once “enlightened, reflected, analytical, calculated, and calculating” but also by agents and techniques permeated by senses of threat and powerlessness (Foucault [1975–76] 2003, 71).

In her ethnohistorical study on the Belgian Congo, Nancy Rose Hunt makes the perceptive remark that such nervousness, frailty, and vulnerability can be understood as one of the two faces or “moods” of the colonial state: the biopolitical state focused on medicine, demography, and public health; and the security state “focused on security, crime, and fearful healing movements, . . . one more guilty and humanitarian, the other nervous and energized by dread” (Hunt 2007, 22). Paying attention to these two interdependent moods may illuminate how biolegitimacy—or the power *of* life in terms of an abstract sacredness of life that may be understood as undergirding current humanitarian impulses in government (see Fassin 2009)—is simultaneously asserted with the concrete valuation of lives, both of which are embedded in a meshwork of contradictory impulses regarding the legitimacy of a state’s rule and what the state would do to ensure its existence, the security of the [European] population, and their intersections with forms of life.⁴

As David Arnold has demonstrated in his study of cholera epidemics in nineteenth-century India, while there were massive deaths among the rural poor from cholera, it was perceived primarily as a military and political threat by a colonial regime heavily dependent on European soldiers (Arnold 1993). As a disease that was unresponsive to the favored therapies at the time, either Western or Indian, cholera not only revealed the physical frailty of colonial rule but also emphasized its political vulnerability. This vulnerability manifested itself in the colonial government’s preoccupation with practices of disease propitiation and expulsion in villages, anxiously viewed as a possible political threat and in need of policing. It also was revealed, however, in the colonial government’s “determinedly anticontagionist” stance vis-à-vis the 1866 International Sanitary Conference, on cholera, which—like the preceding International Sanitary Conferences that sought to secure Europe against the threat of cholera and other diseases they viewed in terms of racialized scourges (see Bynum 1993)—“declared pilgrimages in India to be ‘the most powerful of all the causes which conduce to the development and to the propagation of epidemics of cholera’” (Arnold 1993, 187). This commitment to an anticontagionist stance was not simply a product of colonial medical experts out of touch with cutting-edge

European medicine; rather, it arose both from the reluctance to foot the bill for medical provision for the rural poor and from fear that interference with pilgrimages would threaten the legitimacy of colonial rule by infringing on its promise of “religious tolerance.” Thus the colonial government pursued what Arnold calls a “noninterventionist laissez-faire policy toward cholera” that took cholera not as an urgent issue but as a long-established disease, to be handled in the form of piecemeal intervention and rather complacently, except with regard to specific bodies (195). Even as the cholera vaccine became an available technology of prevention, its use was primarily confined to soldiers, prisoners, and tea-estate workers: those who secured the territory and the existence of the colonial state militarily and commercially, or those who were incarcerated in a site of medical observation and control that was deemed accessible to colonial power and knowledge (see also Misra 2000). Here we see that what is at stake for the colonial government is not only the securing of the biological existence of the European population but also the life of a political entity—stakes that can come into contradiction (see Asad 2013). The abstract nature of biogitimacy finds its concrete specificity in such contradictions.

We have suggested throughout this discussion that, rather than consider the qualifier of *bio-* as that which allows for a clean break from older forms of sociality and of politics, as some recent work on security threats and bioterrorism would suggest (see Lakoff and Collier 2008), we can query the ways in which biosecurity, biopolitics, and biogitimacy are embedded in these older forms and may be transformed by them or transforming of them. Further, an attunement to the senses of vulnerability and fragility suffusing the state can illuminate the contradictory ways in which projects of biosecurity and biopolitics are tied together.⁵ Keeping in view the ways in which newness is embedded in older forms complicates an evolutionary or linearly accretive view of citizenship that scholarship that privileges the power of biology to generate newness in social life tends to rely on. Nikolas Rose, for instance, finds it “useful” to “think of a kind of evolution of citizenship since the eighteenth century in Europe, North America, and Australia: the civil rights granted in the eighteenth century necessitated the extension of political citizenship in the nineteenth century and of social citizenship in the twentieth century” as the starting point for his discussion of biological citizenship (Rose and Novas 2005, 440). In this view, citizenship projects move along an evolutionary line from the rights of man, which finds their origins in natural law, to the emergence of the liberal state, which guarantees the rights of those bound to a nation-state through law that humans themselves author. This national citizenship, Rose argues, is today challenged by citizenship claims on the basis of the “bare life” in the form of human rights claims and by what he calls “biological citizenship”: claims to citizenship on the basis of biological knowledge in the form of genomics. Rose posits that this citizenship is both individual and collectivizing. Individuals come to have a relationship to themselves in terms of their biology—the knowledge of risks of disease and capacity for health inscribed in their genomes. And this knowledge gives rise to “new forms of ‘biosociality’” in which collectivities are created around “a biological conception of shared identity” (442).

In their discussion of “biopower today,” Rabinow and Rose further elaborate this model of citizenship based on the new genomics. They contend that after World War II, a biological understanding of race was “no longer ‘in the true’ in political or policy discourse” and that race, though a socioeconomic category, was largely unhooked from a biological understanding (Rabinow and Rose 2006, 206). However, with genomics a new molecular deployment of race emerges that has opened up new ways of conceptualizing population differences in terms of geography and ancestry and has spurred on the creation of patient groups who demand “genomic self-knowledge” (207). Biopower today does not involve the “wholesale management of populations”; instead, Rabinow and Rose insist, the form that biopolitics takes has to do with “attempts to develop and maximize targets for pharmaceutical markets and other health care interventions which entail enrolling individuals, patient groups, doctors, and political actors in campaigns of disease awareness and treatment in the name of the maximization of the quality of life” (211). Thus, a defining characteristic of biological citizenship is that of “active” citizenship, in which the citizen is made up through his or her “self-care” and participates in biosocial groupings that engage in forms of medical and patient activism, largely geared toward gaining access to services and combating stigma (Rose 2007). What is striking in this discussion, however, is that the issues surrounding identity and the demand for recognition are largely absorbed within a liberal framework that is implicitly taken as universal and all-encompassing.

Our claim is that these elaborations of biological citizenship and biosociality tend to sidestep the knotting together of identity and existence in the politics of recognition around biological conditions. We emphasize that the point here is not to simply assume a commonality among various conditions or to meld diverse stakes in biological conditions into a general theory of biological citizenship, but rather to *look* at the ways in which identity and existence are tied to each other. Existence, we suggest, can involve both biological existence and one’s place or one’s way of being in the world. The notion of life encompasses both biological life and one’s life as a social being, just as death is not only about biological death but also about the disappearing of a whole way of being so that the individual can find no recognition of his or her collective existence in the world. Looking and seeing may reveal the varied ways in which the biological and social are knitted into each other in the demand for recognition, and may also demonstrate, as philosopher Charles Taylor delicately suggests, that the demand for recognition may surpass a framework of rights liberalism (Taylor 1994); for it may involve issues of the survival of culture, or of one’s way of life, which is connected to the acknowledgement of worth. Let us take three cases—Deaf activism, the neurodiversity movement, and AIDS activism—to give further substance to this thought.⁶

In a beautiful essay on being and reality, Ghassan Hage describes his gradual loss of hearing and then its recuperation with a cochlear implant (Hage 2014). The loss of hearing implicated not just a changed biological status, but indeed a loss of “part of my being.” As Hage relates, since he was a child he was inclined toward eavesdropping—a

habit that became a durable mode of being and situated him as a listener within a “different hearing reality” (149). He remarks, “Indeed, when I lost my capacity to eavesdrop [due to his deafness] it wasn’t a ‘point of view’ on or a representation of reality that I lost but a whole reality that I had been inhabiting and that was no longer available for me to inhabit” (150). Yet after Hage received a cochlear implant, he began to “yearn every now and then for the world of deafness, which was not as dominated by symbolic or symbolizable dimensions. . . . It is not a world without words, but rather even words themselves, as they lose this sharp differentiation, start conveying less symbolic meaning and more an emotional charge” (154).

What Hage brilliantly renders here is how deafness—a biological condition—becomes a part of one’s being, one’s disposition. We can expand these thoughts to the contentious debates over cochlear implant technology within the Deaf community and between Deaf activists, hearing parents, and medical professionals. Whereas medical professionals and hearing parents have applauded cochlear implant technology as an alternative to deafness, Deaf activists have argued that the cochlear implant casts deafness as a disability, and moreover is a denial of Deaf culture (see Blume 1997; Blume 2010; Brusky 1995). This denial, they argue, is acutely threatening because it not only denies the recognition of actually existing members of Deaf culture but, even more, presents a threat to the survival of Deaf culture by making hearing children out of deaf children. Cochlear implant technology, however, has also provoked heated debates within the Deaf community, particularly between late-deafened adults and those born deaf, indicating that the ties between identity and existence vary not only in relation to a biological condition, but in how that biological condition emerges in a life.

This heterogeneity of experience shaped Deaf activism’s public criticism of this technology. Stuart Blume remarks that the British Deaf Association (BDA) made a public position of “non-support” only after heated internal debate. Yet the language deployed in their demonstration of nonsupport is illuminating: “The drive to ‘normalise’ Deaf people, by *increasing the quantity of sound which can be sensed*, carries with it the danger of alienating the Deaf person from their own self-identity, and from *their own natural community and its living language*, without allowing full integration and access to hearing society” (BDA 1994, 25–26, quoted in Blume 1997, 49; emphasis ours). Note here how deafness is expressed in terms of a “natural community” with a “living language.” This “living language” involves sign language, but the stakes here are not just to make accessible different options to learn (about) sign language. The idea of a natural community with a living language points to the way in which we inhabit our life *in* language. Whereas those who are blind would not consider themselves as inhabiting a “blind culture,” or at least have not done so, those with deafness identify with a culture in which a notion of the good life arises.⁷ As a Deaf activist remarks, “In the broadest sense, a human being, hearing or deaf, is better off having rich, meaningful and satisfying dialogues with only 100 individuals than to have superficial, parrot like, and stifled dialogues with 10 million individuals” (quoted in Brusky 1995, 255). Rich, meaningful, and satisfying dialogues

contrast with a “parrot like” repetition of sounds that would render language lifeless. At stake is the inhabitation of the world in a human way, at least in this corner of the human. Thus, the threat of cochlear implant technology is perceived in its capacity to extinguish a collective way of being—ways of feeling, of attuning, of sharing, and of self-understanding that give one a future in one’s culture. It may be for this reason that the deaf child is at the center of this heated debate. As the bearer of the future of culture, the child learns language not simply as an individual accomplishment but also as the one who holds the promise that the potential inherent in language will not disappear. Deaf activists see cochlear implant technology as extinguishing this possibility that, although born through a biological condition, allows a culture to survive.

We can locate overlapping concerns with the activists of the neurodiversity movement, particularly around the controversial therapy called *Applied Behavior Analysis*—a cognitive behavioral therapy that has been applied to ever-younger children with autism in order to assist these children in establishing and maintaining visual contact and performing limited cognitive tasks (Ortega 2009). For some autistic self-advocates, this therapy suppresses the autistic way of being and casts autism as a disease to be normalized rather than a different way of being that should be celebrated. As scholars have pointed out, the formation of an autistic culture can be understood as inspired by Deaf culture, and self-advocates draw parallels between the Internet as a technology that has done “what was thought impossible, to bind autistics together into groups,” as sign language did for Deaf culture (see Grinker 2008; Singer 1999, quoted in Ortega 2009, 432). It is interesting in this context to turn to the terms with which individuals with autism draw on Deaf culture. As one autism self-advocate remarks, “The computer is kind of like what sign language is for the Deaf. It’s the autistic way of *communicating*” (quoted in Bagatell 2010, 37; emphasis ours). Here we see the computer emerge as a technology that allows for communication by virtue of its being a “buffer” or “mediator” (Bagatell 2010, 37). The emphasis on communication may reveal more about the stakes in *achieving sociality* in diverse ways.

Against a picture of autism as a disease that disallows sociality in terms of emotional attachment and the capacity for interaction, self-advocates in the neurodiversity movement seek to amplify and extend the assumed boundaries of human sociality. Forms of autistic sociality, self-advocates argue, emerge from ways of being that are integral to who they are: “[I]t colors every experience, every sensation, perception, thought, emotion, and encounter, every aspect of existence (Sinclair 1993, quoted in Ortega 2009, 433). An autistic way of being is therefore not in need of cure or prevention, but rather in need of social and technological supports that would allow for a mode of communication that comes naturally. In this sense, autism is seen as contingently disabling, and thus a “socially constructed” disability that derives from neurological difference (Bagatell 2010, 38). Those with low-functioning autism and their caregivers, however, argue that medical intervention may be the only way to live with what they experience as disease. They argue that in the neurodiversity movement’s celebration of neurological difference, self-advocates—who are primarily

“high-functioning”—tend to uphold an idea of independence that those parents of children with low-functioning autism or those with low-functioning autism themselves find discordant with the enormous efforts that go into care and into living.

Underlying the tensions over whether one *has* autism or *is* autistic—that is, *how* one identifies with this biological condition—may be the delicate question of how dependency is admitted into social and political life. Is the disability lived by low-functioning autistics a social construction that can be addressed through social supports to allow for “independent” living, or is there a genuine dependency that calls for acknowledgment not only for the person with autism, but for his or her caregivers? Is lifelong dependency compatible with a liberal conception of citizenship?

The feminist philosopher Eva Feder Kittay points out the difficulties that have arisen for severely mentally retarded people in relation to the disability rights movement, which she argues has “followed a blueprint developed by persons of color, women, and gays and lesbians. All of these attempts by the marginalized to be recognized and fully enfranchised demand that the practice of liberalism be consistent with its tenets of universal equality and freedom” (Kittay 2001, 559). Severe mental retardation, however, may be “liberalism’s limit case”: “liberalism invokes a notion of political participation in which one makes one’s voice heard. It depends on a conception of the person as independent, rational, and capable of self-sufficiency. And it holds to a conception of society as an association of such independent equals” (559). For the mentally retarded individual, to be heard or recognized, to have her or his needs and wants responded to, requires “an advocate” and entails a relationship between dependent and advocate that “falls outside the conventional understandings of the relationship between equals within liberalism” (562), while also revealing the mutual dependency that is constitutive to our lives as humans. With dependency, care becomes central, both as a labor and in terms of its texture: “how the care is bestowed makes all the difference between the potential for harm and spirit-sustaining aid” (575).

Kittay’s discussion of care points to limitations in Rose’s model of “active” biological citizenship discussed earlier. The demand for recognition for the severely mentally retarded demonstrates that ideas of “self-care” in which the self is understood as the independent, rational, and self-possessed actor who seeks to maximize his or her interest may be a potent fiction of liberalism, which contributes to the failure to be open to other ways of being and to the crucial place of care in making a world inhabitable. Acknowledging the demand for recognition may entail seeing the self in terms of relationships, such that the *responses* to the concrete other reveal the human self.

In turning to AIDS activism, we see how existence and identity are tied to each other in ways that contrast with both Deaf activism and the neurodiversity movement. AIDS activism in the United States found an anchor in the gay community and was folded into that community’s forging of identity as it sought to challenge the linked stigmas of so-called deviant sexuality and disease. Yet, we might say that HIV/AIDS is not a biological condi-

tion that people with AIDS would claim as their culture—a way of being in itself that demanded recognition. Rather, AIDS threatened ways of being both in terms of the stigma it generated and also in terms of biological existence. Activism can be understood as responding to these threats as well as to the deaths from AIDS that marked communities and individuals.

In his study of the impassioned and often harrowing work of the AIDS movement in the late 1980s and '90s, Steven Epstein (1996) elaborates how the AIDS movement is “more than just a ‘disease constituency’ pressuring the government for more funding” but also an “alternative basis of expertise.” This “expertification” of the AIDS movement, however, grew not only out of AIDS activists learning of a new scientific language but also in their deployment of images and discourses that conveyed the matters of physical life and death at stake in scientific research and its regulation. Thus Epstein notes how, amid growing concern over the Food and Drug Administration’s regulatory requirements and the commitment of the National Institute for AIDS to placebo-controlled clinical trials, the notion of “genocide-by-neglect” emerged within activist rhetoric. As New York activist Larry Kramer argued, “Many of us who live in daily terror of the AIDS epidemic cannot understand why the Food and Drug Administration has been so intransigent in the face of this monstrous tidal wave of death” (quoted in Epstein 1996, 222). Seeing the FDA as one of the major barriers to access to AIDS treatments, the activist organization ACT UP, initiated in the late 1980s, staged events and demonstrations that drew on this notion of genocide. As Epstein describes it, the October 11, 1988, protest at the FDA headquarters sought to “‘seize control’ of what was labeled the ‘Federal Death Administration.’ Protestors fell to the ground holding mock tombstones with caustic inscriptions: ‘I got the placebo R.I.P.’; ‘As a person of color I was exempt from the drug trials’” (225). The emphasis on impending deaths of individuals and communities “touched by AIDS” shows us how activism around this condition tied the efforts to secure biological existence into *varied* projects of identity making. Working both to secure access to treatment and to transform how science was done with respect to AIDS were ways in which AIDS activists sought to secure the lives of themselves and others already marked by death and disease.

In the search for treatment, AIDS activism also revealed both the scientific conventions that constituted “good science” and the form of the liberal contract that underpins human experimentation in medical science. Arguing on the basis of their rights as research subjects, activists sought to change the design of clinical trials from the convention of placebo control. While seeking to expand access to experimental therapies outside of the boundaries of clinical trials, activists drew attention to the implicit coercion in clinical trials research that was emerging as people with AIDS sought treatment. As an AIDS activist remarked, “[I]t was morally offensive to use access to treatment as a lever to force subjects into studies” (quoted in Epstein 1996, 227–28). Such controversies over the boundaries between research subject and patient, and over what constitutes “good science,” have been extensively examined in terms of the ways in which market-driven

medical research and state regulatory norms work in tandem in the exploitation of the individual's search for cure and the appropriation of bodies as biological resources. Adriana Petryna, in her study of the global clinical trials industry, argues that the conventions of "good science" are mobilized in the rationale for seeking "treatment naive" populations outside of the United States and Western Europe for clinical trials, which rely on the notion of informed consent in which subjects assume risks in their search for cure (Petryna 2009). Elaborating what he calls "biocapital," Kaushik Sunder Rajan argues that structural violence underpins globalizing ethics in clinical trials. The violence of the liberal contract is evidenced in its freeing of subjects to make their bodies available to experimentation; in low-income sites, healthy subjects subject themselves to risk as a means of economic survival (Sunder Rajan 2006).

Studying the clinical applications of human embryonic stem cell therapies in India, Aditya Bharadwaj insightfully remarks that the case of "structurally violent clinical trials" demonstrates how "the inherently violent nature of *demarcated* spaces . . . gets stabilized as a global gold standard [of] good manufacturing or good clinical practice" (Bharadwaj 2014, 97). Demarcated spaces of science, or what Bharadwaj calls "normal science," are those spaces restricted to a polity of interested professionals and demand specific ways of performing, witnessing, and validating. Focusing on a maverick experimental site that has gained a large patient base through the clinical application of experimental stem cell therapies, Bharadwaj shows how a sense of norm violation underlies its global reception as a "dangerous experiment." The scientific director of this clinic, for instance, has not moved through the "obligatory passage points" of demonstrating efficacy in animal models and validation of one's findings in the form of publications, which are the modality of witnessing for the scientific polity. As such, "[t]he agency of spinal cord patients traversing the globe in the search of recovery and their narratives of healing are rejected as mere placebo or desperation as opposed to *credible data*" (97). Bharadwaj's analysis reveals limitations to straightforward narratives of innocent victimhood or willful, informed decision making, which seem to fall along taken-for-granted ideas of a North-South divide and of an unregulated Third World that the First World exploits. Instead, focusing on individuals' search for therapeutic possibilities may cast the *conditions* for scientific knowledge and care in an entirely different light: "their frail and failing bodies, having reached the definite limits of therapeutic possibilities embedded in biomedicine, compel projects of experimental self-formation around the globe. For these protagonists, therapeutic options at 'home' come with a caveat: demands for care can be honoured only so long as these can be normalized within disciplinary confines of state, science, and clinic" (104).

The search for cure and the limits of therapeutic security associated with citizenship that it reveals bring us back to Fassin's insights with which we started this section: that in engaging *life*, there is more at stake than the regulation of populations and the deliberate actions of the state to create regularities. The challenge is to see how the biological and the social come to be absorbed into each other in concrete, specific ways. Fassin

suggests that this absorption can be understood in terms of the biological and the biographical. The politics of life, he argues, involves the valuation of lives in terms of the inequality of lives as much as in the ways in which the physical existence of the singular living being is imbricated with the social norms and the social inequalities in which she or he is embedded. Might paying attention to the singular living being illuminate this imbrication of the biological and social in ways that might escape the confines of regularities and deliberate action? If norms are not simply represented but also experienced in the body, how might newness emerge for the living being?

VARIATION AND MILIEU

We respond to these questions by first turning to the ways in which anthropology has approached the entanglement of the biological and the social. One concept that has been particularly powerful is that of *local biologies*, which Margaret Lock developed in order to acknowledge the significance of the biological and to challenge a presumed biological universality of the human body that biomedicine was seen to uphold (Lock 1993; Lock 2013). In her comparative study of aging and menopause in Japan and the United States, Lock raises the question of whether different symptoms are indicative of having been socialized into representing the same disease differently or whether these symptoms are expressive of a different biology. Indeed, she argues, the norms of gender and sexuality were part of the way in which the body itself was experienced; they were not only representations of the body (Lock 1993).

More recently, Lock and Vinh-Kim Nguyen extended the idea of local biologies through elaborating the notion of “biosocial differentiation,” which they define as “the continual interactions of biological and social processes across time and space that eventually sediment into local biologies” (Lock and Nguyen 2010, 90). “Local biologies” are here understood as “snapshots” of both evolutionary time and the *longue durée* of historical change: “Understanding the body as contextually situated means that we attribute variations in biology to regularities produced by temporal processes rather than to statistical laws.”

It may be helpful at this point to consider the emphasis on *contextualization* in both the earlier and recent work of Lock more closely. Although the scholarship on local biologies has certainly gone a long way in unsettling any idea of a universal biology, we find it striking how context arises as, for the most part, a taken-for-granted entity through which the material body gains its particularity. In the commitment to illustrating the “context-dependence” of biology as defined against an abstract universal body, however, far less attention is paid to the problem of individuality, or variation *as an aspect of the living being* (see, for instance, Brotherton and Nguyen 2013; Hamdy 2013).⁸ Although Lock and Nguyen acknowledge that “humans are unique with respect to both their genomes and their lived experience and in this respect embodiment is personal,” the case studies they offer—on the neurological disease kuru, health disparities in birthweight

and preterm birth, and the transformation of microbes by human activity—are attempts to discern what the authors call “regularities” that distinguish groups or “patterned variation in subjective bodily experience” based on the assumption that “inevitably certain experiences are relatively similar across groups of people living in shared environments” (2010, 91). If we take the problem of individuality—or variation—instead as a starting point for the mutual inflection of biological and social norms, “context” begins to appear in a different light.

We take as our guiding inspiration here Georges Canguilhem’s repeated attention to the problem of individuality as a problem of the relation of organism with the milieu.⁹ As is well known, in *The Normal and the Pathological* Canguilhem challenged a pervasive view in medicine, biology, and physiology that conceived of the normal and the pathological as a matter of quantitative difference (Canguilhem 1991). Instead, the concepts of the normal and the pathological, he argued, must be interpreted as vital values: for it is the organism as a whole that experiences disease. Take the presence of sugar in the urine, known as glycosuria—a classic symptom of diabetes. As Canguilhem argues, in seeing glycosuria in terms of physico-chemical laws—as a problem of colloidal equilibria—we fail to see the vital quality of glycosuria. A quantitative difference matters insofar as it takes on a vital value for the living being, be it the patient or the physician. It is the experience of the sick man that is generative of biological knowledge through therapeutics, or the search for cure. To put it on an even more quotidian level, we might recall Wittgenstein’s wonderful example in which he says that as I sympathize with a man who has pain in his hand, I do not look at the hand but look at the face or in his eyes—for I take it for granted that it is not the hand that suffers but the person who suffers.

This attention to the concrete living being in its specificity forms the basis for Canguilhem’s elaboration of the concept of normativity. Drawing on Kurt Goldstein’s clinical observations of men with head wounds during the 1914–18 war, he remarks,

What Goldstein pointed out in his patients is the establishment of new norms of life by a reduction in their level of activity as related to a new but narrowed environment. The narrowing of the environment in patients with cerebral lesions corresponds to their impotence in responding to the demands of the normal, that is, the previous environment. . . . The patient is sick because he can admit of only one norm . . . the sick man is not abnormal because of the absence of the norm but because of his incapacity to be normative. . . . The content of the pathological cannot be deduced, save for a difference in format, from the content of health; disease is not a variation on the dimension of health; it is a new dimension of life.” (1991, 186)

Health, on the other hand, cannot be simply equated with normal, as the pathological is “one kind of normal” and being healthy is “not only normal in a given situation, but being normative in this and in other eventual situations” (Canguilhem 1991, 196).

Goldstein's observations guide Canguilhem to the remarkable idea that there are "two kinds of original modes of life," or the "dynamic polarity of life": the normatively normal, in which normal constants may be transcended; and the pathologically normal, which "have the death of normativity" in them (206). At stake here is the *relation* of the living being and the milieu, neither of which are held constant, that defines the pathological for the living being.

In his essay "The Normal and the Pathological" in *Knowledge of Life*, Canguilhem further elaborates the problem of individuality as a stance and a method (Canguilhem 2008). Taking issue with the Platonic conception of laws in experimental physiologist Claude Bernard's biology, Canguilhem proposes life as an "order of properties": "an organization of forces and a hierarchy of functions whose stability is necessarily precarious, for it is the solution to the problem of equilibrium, compensation, and compromise between different and competing powers" (125). While Bernard's biology would see the individual as "a provisional and regrettable irrationality" against an ideal type, Canguilhem sees the individual as the site of novelty: "individual singularity can be interpreted as either a failure or as an attempt, as a fault or as an adventure" (125). Anomalies do not in themselves constitute pathological facts, but can acquire a negative vital value when their effects are assessed in relation to the milieu in which certain tasks have become unavoidable in the living being (129). The moment when anomaly shifts to disease cannot therefore be determined in advance, just as for Wittgenstein the scale of the human body or the range of the human voice cannot be determined in advance but must be found in each case (see Das 1998; 2007). Canguilhem remarks, "We cannot determine the normal by simple reference to a statistical mean *but only comparing the individual to itself*, either in identical successive situations or in varied situations" (2008, 113; emphasis added). We can appreciate that "individual singularity" is conceived here not only as a difference *between* individual living beings but also, in terms of variation, as an aspect of the individual himself or herself. Vital norms are internal to the singular concrete living being; as Canguilhem paraphrases Goldstein: "[T]he norm, he tells us, must help us understand concrete individual cases" (129). Lock and Nguyen's impulse to discern the entanglement of "biological and social processes" as they sediment in local biologies is of great importance, but their research strategy is to discern differences *across* groups, whereas Canguilhem's perspective inclines us to attend to the singular relationship of the organism with its environment.¹⁰

At this point we might ask, But isn't this attention to individuality, or variation as an aspect of the individual, already at the heart of the medical gaze? As is well known, Michel Foucault, in *The Birth of the Clinic*, meticulously charts the shift from a pedagogy of species and classes to one of function and space made possible through pathological anatomy (Foucault 1994). Whereas in the former the individual was absorbed into the type, in the latter, individuality is the basis for understanding disease. As Foucault argues, through pathological anatomy's detailing of the "most individual of flesh" (171), a new perception of death gives birth to a form of the individual: "It is when death became the

concrete a priori of medical experience that death could detach itself from counter-nature and become *embodied* in the *living bodies* of individuals” (195). Human finitude thus authorizes a scientific discourse in which individuality is to appear in “the objectivity that manifests and conceals it, that denies it and yet forms its basis” (198). Foucault’s preoccupation here is with the positive knowledge that defines disease to stabilize health. Clinical norms emerge on the basis of the knowledge of individual bodies and their variations, but medicine’s knowledge of “the individual” cannot be confused with the *problem* of individuality for the living being.

We suggest here that Canguilhem explores the problem of individuality precisely as a problem: not that which is settled, but that which is precarious and thus achieved through enormous effort. We can appreciate this precariousness in his essay “Is a Pedagogy of Healing Possible?” in *Writings on Medicine* (Canguilhem 2012). Here, Canguilhem explores how healing is placed awkwardly in and beyond the doctor–patient relationship. Whereas cure in medicine is defined externally through conventionally accepted knowledge for the purpose of treating the patient, healing “is experienced and avowed by the patient” (58). The patient’s experience with disease and the hope to recover a lost health introduces into medicine an experience that is not at all transparent. A patient who might be cured of infection might continue to insist on feeling unwell, while a patient might also become ill through being cured, by perceiving around himself or herself a “residual noxiousness” or an anxiety in the patient’s circle that lingers around an unforgiving disease. As such, “health and healing arise from a genre of discourse other than the one whose vocabulary and syntax we learn in medical treatises and clinical lectures” (59). Vital norms can be mismatched with clinical norms, a reality that the physician has difficulty considering precisely because the mismatch reveals the limits of his efficacy. Canguilhem thus rejects responses within medical education that would seek to transform this experience into a matter that can be adequately addressed through textbooks: “Should one introduce into university-hospital education of future doctors instruction in ‘convivial’ participation and thus tests and exams in aptitude for human contact? . . . Human contact is neither taught nor learned in the same way as the physiology of the autonomic nervous system” (64–65). To learn to heal, then, moves beyond medical knowledge proper to acknowledge that healing is not a return to a previous state, but rather a new state that is marked by the experience of disease.¹¹

We now come to the question, Does an attention to the problem of individuality help us see “context” in a different light? Up to this point in our discussion, we have seen how vital norms are internal to the living being but would not have significance independent of the milieu. We have considered how the sick person experiences his or her milieu as a new milieu, one that is “narrowed” or shrunk, while a healthy person is able not only to stabilize the relationship to the milieu but also to transcend it by positing new norms. In this sense, we can suggest that the singularity of the living being and the milieu, while semiautonomous from each other, are woven together and being woven simultaneously. There is no fixed milieu as much as there is no taken-for-granted individual.

In his essay “The Living and Its Milieu,” Canguilhem provides a critical comparison of theories of the milieu to find their common point of departure and thus postulate “their fecundity for a philosophy of nature centered on the problem of individuality” (Canguilhem 2008, 98). Canguilhem intricately traces the migration of the notion of milieu from Newtonian mechanics to biology, and the reversals in the relation of the living being and the milieu as this view acquired diverse lives in evolutionary theory, geography, and physiology. The notion of milieu in Newtonian mechanics followed a principle of action and reaction in which the milieu represented “an indefinitely extendable line or plane, at once continuous and homogenous” (103). While bringing the notion of milieu into biology, Comte’s *Course of Positive Philosophy* may have had a “hint of an authentically biological acceptance and more flexible usage of the word,” according to Canguilhem, but it ultimately gave way to “the prestige of mechanics, an exact science in which prediction is based on calculation” (102). This spatialized notion of milieu thus becomes the “universal instrument for the dissolution of individualized organic syntheses into the anonymity of universal elements and movements” (103).

As this notion of milieu migrated into geography, “the treatment of anthropological and human ethnological questions . . . became more and more deterministic, or rather, mechanistic.” The living in these studies is “light and heat, carbon and oxygen, calcium and weight. It responds by muscular contractions to sensory excitations; it responds with a scratch to an itch, with flight to an explosion. But one can and must ask: Where is the living? We see individuals, but these are objects; we see gestures, but these are displacements; centers, but these are environments; machinists, but these are machines. The milieu of behavior coincides with the geographical milieu, with the physical milieu.” But, as Canguilhem argues, as life offers solutions to problems, “human reaction to provocation by the milieu is diversified” (2008, 109). In Jakob von Uexküll’s study of animal psychology and Goldstein’s study of human pathology, Canguilhem observes, “the relation between the living and the milieu establishes itself as a debate, to which the living brings its own proper norms of appreciating situations, both dominating the milieu and accommodating itself to it” (113). This relation does not essentially consist in a struggle, but can also be one of “suppleness, almost softness.”

In this relation, we can further appreciate how the living being’s responsiveness reveals a capacity for newness in the world. It is here that we might locate a significant tension between the way in which *contextualization* is deployed in local biologies and the relation of the living being and milieu that we are elaborating here. If contextualization is understood as demonstrating the impact or sedimentation of history in biology such that there is no universal body, we might further ask what picture of inheritance this notion of contextualization implies. Let us take Lock’s (2013) recent discussion of epigenetics, which she argues not only draws attention to the entanglements of nature/nurture at the molecular level but also may create new imaginations of what social justice and accountability would entail (304). Drawing on neo-Lamarckian thought, Lock proposes that in light of massive human tragedies, “matters of restitution should, surely,

extend beyond individuals directly affected by trauma, and incorporate recognition of neo-Lamarckian marks of human atrocities and abuse.” Such neo-Lamarckian marks consist of the “intergenerational transmission of biological changes brought about by traumatic effects” (304).

We might compare this perspective with the mechanistic view implicated in French neo-Lamarckism, which Canguilhem characterizes in the following way: “When the French neo-Lamarckians borrow from Lamarck, if not the term *milieu* in the singular and its absolute sense, then at least the idea they have of it, they retained of the morphological characteristics and functions of the living *only their formation by exterior conditioning*—only, so to speak, their formation by deformation” (Canguilhem 2008, 103; emphasis added). For Canguilhem, what is essential to Lamarck’s ideas is that the organism’s adaptation to, in Lamarck’s view, a largely indifferent milieu crucially depended on the initiative of the organism’s needs, efforts, and continual reactions: “The milieu provokes the organism to orient its becoming by itself. Biological response far exceeds physical stimulation” (115).

With Canguilhem, we come to see the milieu from the vantage point of the singular living being, in which the place of perception is crucial: “The milieu proper to man is the world of his perception—in other words, the field of his pragmatic experience in which his actions, oriented and regulated by the values immanent to his tendencies, pick out quality-bearing objects and situate them in relation to each other and him” (118). The milieu is centered on the living being, whose precarious responses to need, to disease, to health lost, and to healing reveal its singularity.

But, just as Canguilhem helps us see the problem of individuality for the living being, thus helping us see how the shift from anomaly to disease cannot be known in advance, we may ask of Canguilhem if the human voice and the scale and range of the human body, too, cannot be known in advance. For we might query how Canguilhem’s commitment to retrieving the vital from mechanism may lead him to take the human as a somewhat stable entity, clearly differentiated from other organisms through the customs, social organization, and technologies that define the existence of “man” as a living being. Whereas Canguilhem helps us attune to the variation internal to the living being as it is tied to a dynamic milieu, thus illuminating the mutual inflection of biological and social norms in man, there is far less attention paid to the tenuousness with which social norms, customs, and practices are aligned with man’s sense as a living being. How might we attend to the fragility of life, in the sense of a *human* form of life?

FORMS OF LIFE: A WITTGENSTEINIAN PROVOCATION

The network of concepts that have emerged so far—the relation between the natural and the social; the mobility of the normal and the pathological in both individual and collective life; the variability across social formations as well as that which is internal to the life of the individual; and how death is absorbed within life—all these issues point to concerns

that traverse the whole field of anthropology rather than being confined within the boundaries of medical anthropology or STS alone. In this final section we turn to the concept of form of life from Wittgenstein to ask if we might find a different way of conceptualizing the issues we discussed—the way in which the natural appears as integral to the social but goes beyond the current conceptions of biology; how the singularity of individual lives is to be understood; and how forms of life might also nurture forms of death. As we suggested earlier, a more sustained attention to the expression “form of life” might help to introduce the idea that human beings have a life *in* language and that their expressions constitute a kind of natural history of humankind as found in a particular corner of the human.¹² Otherwise said, language and the world have a relation that is internal to each.

As is well known, Wittgenstein did not provide a sustained discussion of the notion of form(s) of life: references to this expression occur only five times in *Philosophical Investigations* (herewith *PI*), though there are other occasions when the phrase resurfaces, such as in Wittgenstein’s remarks on certainty (Wittgenstein 1953). This lack of a sustained discussion is not because the notion of form of life was peripheral in Wittgenstein’s philosophy but because he thought of it as an ordinary expression—not one that could serve as a conceptual schema. Hence he elucidated it with examples from ordinary life, showing how thought arises from immersion in a form of life. Also consistent with the form of writing in *Philosophical Investigations* that sets the appropriate tone for reading it, we find several voices in conversation—those of accusation and temptation and a countervoice, the voice of calm that reinstates the ordinary. If it is felicitous to describe Wittgenstein as an ordinary language philosopher, it is only on condition that we remember that his picture of the ordinary is neither that of Russell’s or Frege’s, nor is his commonsense that of Moore’s. Further, as Sandra Laugier (among others) has noted, a philosophy of language is a very different mode of engaging the issue of language than linguistic philosophy (or Oxford philosophy) and linguistics, so that even when words such as *performance* and *practice* seem to be common to both, there is a world of difference in how these are deployed (Laugier 2011, 2013).

We consider it important that on the whole Wittgenstein does not think of form of life in the plural (forms of life or form of lives)—though in *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* he does use the plural form (Wittgenstein 1980). What interests us is the resonances among the notions of form of life, culture, society, and sociality on the one hand and those of language-game, expression, and a sense of the natural as they pertain to notions of life on the other.

Let us recapitulate the occasions when the expression “forms of life” appears in *PI*. Consider first the builder’s language, which consists of only four words, orders for bringing something to the construction site. After having discussed how it is easy to imagine a language consisting only of orders and reports in battle and other such contexts, Wittgenstein says famously, “And to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life” (*PI* para. 19). In other words, a language consisting of only orders might be thought of as an

internal part of the operations in the battlefield, whereas it might be a sign of a strange relationship if it were to occur within a matrimonial relationship.

The paragraph before the one cited above had already laid out beautifully the way Wittgenstein thinks of language as always incomplete—growing new dimensions within as a form of life grows or changes: “If you want to say that this shews them [some languages] to be incomplete, ask yourself whether our language is complete;—whether it was so before the symbolism of chemistry and the notation of the infinitesimal calculus were incorporated in it; for these are, so to speak, suburbs of our language” (*PI* para. 18). The picture of language as a city of words in which there are old and new streets, mazes of streets and squares, houses with additions from different periods, as well as new boroughs with straight streets and uniform houses is compelling for the idea that the form of life in which language is housed is heterogeneous with many layers of time; newness here is incorporated but retains the signs of its friction with previously existing forms.

Consider now paragraph 23, where Wittgenstein states, “Here the term ‘*language-game*’ is meant to bring into prominence the fact that *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.” He then goes on to give examples that are varied and include such acts as giving orders and obeying them, forming and testing a hypothesis, doing an addition, asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, and praying.

We take from this paragraph the idea that what Wittgenstein is emphasizing is that forming and testing a hypothesis or solving a sum in arithmetic on the one hand, and praying or greeting on the other, are all actions that spring from our form of life. It is not that the former activities are undertaken in response to objective requirements of science (as the references to the suburbs in the city of words as including notations in chemistry in the previous citation also attest) and the latter activities are indicative of cultural forms that are shared. Rather, both kinds of activities—those we might think of ordinarily as logical operations independent of culture and those we might think of as cultural activities *par excellence*, such as praying—are grown within a form of life. Thus, for instance, the fact that when we perform an addition in arithmetic we do not assume that the sum of the number will change according to the time of the day is something we *naturally* assume from within our form of life; it is what makes it possible to correct someone who gets the number wrong but not to come to blows over whether the sum changes when the clock strikes twelve.

Now consider paragraph 241. It marks the third time that the expression “form of life” occurs in *PI*, and here Wittgenstein says: “‘So you are saying [here is the voice of accusation] that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?’—It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* that they use. This is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.”

Since the preceding paragraph, 240, had shown a scene in which mathematicians do not come to blows over the question of whether a rule was obeyed (they may write scientific papers about it), Wittgenstein suggests that to have an agreement in a form of life is what allows disputes to take one form rather than another; so our idea of form of life is

deepened by the notion that agreement of the kind described by Wittgenstein is what constitutes the condition of possibility for disputes and disagreements to be voiced.

Finally, we want to offer a thought from the remarks Wittgenstein made at the end of his life that are collected in the book *On Certainty*: “You must bear in mind that the language-game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there—like our life” (Wittgenstein [1969] 1972).

A form of life then rests on nothing more than that we agree, or find ourselves agreeing, on the way that we size up things or respond to what we encounter. In Stanley Cavell’s perceptive remarks, nothing is deeper than the fact or the extent of our agreement. But given that Cavell also says that I cannot know in advance as to what I am in accord with, might one say that life has a pulsating, dynamic quality and that the question of what it is to have agreement in a form of life is not a matter settled once and for all but has to be secured by the work that is done on the everyday. Bhrigupati Singh (2014), in his remarkable observations on village life in Rajasthan, India, conceptualizes this dynamic quality in terms of varying intensities, waxing and waning of affect, and movements across different thresholds of life.

Let us pause for a moment and review the implications of the citations on forms of life that we have considered till now. First, Wittgenstein refuses a distinction between logical operations and cultural ones—the domain of nature that is studied objectively and the domain of culture in which our actions are oriented to meaning, affect, or other subjective states. Instead, he suggests that our form of life is the soil from which the activities grow—say, of praying and of solving mathematical puzzles—as well as the forms that disputations on these activities take. This way of imagining a form of life carries important implications for thinking about the “natural” that includes the biological but is not exhausted by it.

Second, since a form of life rests on nothing more than the fact of our agreement—we read this as an agreement to have a future together—neither is it static nor does it follow some pre-given laws that provide the grid on which it will move. What makes this agreement possible is not a formal contract but because ordinary language “embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing and the connections they have found worth marking in the lifetimes of many generations” (Austin [1956] 1961, 182). How far does the idea of a form of life then correspond to our notions of shared conventions? Is Wittgenstein talking about forms of life as that of culturally distinct social groups whose agreements with each other rest on convention, or is he talking of forms of life as the *human* form of life—or, put another way, the form that our existence as human beings takes? We shall see the unique directions in which Wittgenstein’s discussion on these questions takes us.

Third, a form of life, says Wittgenstein, is not reasonable or unreasonable; it is there like our life. What does this sense of a given mean? “What has to be accepted, the given, is—so one could say—forms of life.” (*PI*, para. 226^e). Some have interpreted such statements as

evidence of the conservative character of Wittgenstein's writing; we shall argue that this passage (and others) point to a unique understanding of convention as forming a bedrock beyond which there is no appeal; or, as the famous example of the spade states, "[M]y spade is turned" (*PI*, para. 217). Yet Wittgenstein is also insistent that it is philosophical grammar (Stanley Cavell calls this "criteria") that tells us what an object in our world is: yet grammar for Wittgenstein is completely arbitrary: "Grammar is not accountable to any reality. It is grammatical rules that determine meaning (constitute it) and so they themselves are not answerable to any meaning and to that extent are arbitrary" (*Philosophical Grammar* [1974], para. 184). This mutual implication of conventional and natural, the given and the arbitrary, blocks any temptation for a quick answer on the side of either mere convention or complete determination for defining what a form of life is, and it constitutes one of the richest archives one could imagine for thinking of our lives as humans.

There is some debate in the literature as to whether a form of life corresponds completely to the boundaries of a given community—hence Wittgenstein is evoking an ethnological sense of a shared culture of habits and dispositions, rules and customs—or whether the expression refers to a single human form of life. But the issue as we see it is not an either-or kind of issue. We can follow a lead from Cavell's remarkable analysis of the two separate dimensions of the expressions "form" and "life"—or the horizontal dimension of forms and the vertical dimension of life—the former corresponding to different societal arrangements and the latter to the idea of how life might be defined as a *human* form of life.

It is helpful here to pay attention to the examples Cavell gives of the horizontal or ethnological sense of *form* and the vertical dimension of *life*. In the former case we might think of the difference between, say, coronation and inauguration, or different societal arrangements for the devolution of property. In the latter case the differences alluded to are those of being human or being animal or being bird—thus eating, pawing, or pecking, each act meeting a biological need but only in ways that humans or animals or birds do. Das (1998, 2007) has elaborated further that what language expresses here is the idea of a *naturalness* of the act of eating, pawing, or pecking as belonging to our lives as humans, as distinct from what is natural for animals or birds. It was this sense of the naturalness of what the human form of life implied that was broken in the terrible violence of the Partition of India that Das (2007) studied. She showed that women's bodies not only were broken but were claimed as if they were just property—surfaces to write male enmities on. Thus the parodying of the social contract by its sexualization did not simply rupture the fabric of the social but questioned the very idea that one had a human form of life. Thus instead of finding criteria by which we could determine what constituted the boundaries of a form of life or determining whether the expression "form of life" refers to the sociocultural differences or to the form human existence takes, we might, following Cavell and Das, think of these two aspects as nestling into each other, the social and the natural mutually absorbing each other.

In a justly famous paragraph, Cavell says,

We learn and we teach certain words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humor and of significance and of fulfillment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation—all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls “forms of life.” Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying. (1969, 52)

The agreement that Cavell then points out redefines our understanding of how language and the world are not external to each other but have an internal relation. Thus the issue is not whether we understand the meaning of words but whether we understand each other about when an utterance is a rebuke or an assertion or a joke. This agreement does not arise from the fact that we share the meanings of the words we use but rather arises because in learning a language we learn a form of life and hence can project words into the future with some assurance that they will be received in a spirit of our wanting to be understood by each other, for if our words cannot be received, they cannot be understood, either.

Here is a remarkable formulation on the physiognomy of words in *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (vol. 1), where Wittgenstein says: “The familiar face of a word; the feeling that a word is as it were a picture of its meaning; that it has, as it were, taken its meaning up into itself—it’s possible for there to be a language to which all that is alien. And how is that expressed among us? By the way we choose and value words” (p. 3e, para. 6).

Or the earlier “meaning is a physiognomy” (*PI*, para. 568).

It is worth pausing to take a deep breath here, for Wittgenstein is cautioning us about any hurried conclusions about what is natural and what is mere convention. Is our feeling of familiarity with how we use words arising from the facts of shared conventions an arbitrary construct of culture? Or is this feeling something that evokes the idea of the naturalness of certain ways of being in the world that are recognized in one’s culture but that also allow us to project the idea of the humanity of an other who is embedded in a different social group?

Let us see a remarkable formulation of this issue in *PI* (paras. 595, 596):

It is natural for us to say a sentence in such-and-such surroundings, and unnatural to say it in isolation. Are we to say that there is a particular feeling accompanying the utterance of every sentence when we say it naturally?

The feeling of “familiarity” and of “naturalness.” It is easier to get at a feeling of unfamiliarity and unnaturalness. Or, at *feelings*. For not everything that is unfamiliar to us makes

an impression of unfamiliarity upon us. If we find a boulder on the road we know it to be a boulder but perhaps not for the one that has always lain there. We recognize a man as a man but not perhaps as an acquaintance.

We want to flag two thoughts here: first, that our feelings of familiarity arise from being within a form of life, so we accept certain actions—such as a way of speaking, or recognizing emotion, or expecting the world to be like this and not like that. If something appears to be strange, we know that we can find explanations, ways of reordering the object we found strange, from within our way of life. Say, a boulder that has always lain on a path I usually take is replaced by another boulder. I will have explanations that come to me—perhaps, that someone is going to build something there. Or, if I expect to see an acquaintance and find someone else, I know this person to be a man and not a tiger. I do not have to work to compare this man with an existing picture of men I have in my mind to recognize that this nonacquaintance is still a man. But now consider that something unfamiliar confronts me that is entirely outside my experience. I go to visit another country and find that everybody there assumes that twice two is five. What would it mean to say that though everyone believes twice two is five, it still is four. Wittgenstein says, “Well I could imagine that people had a different calculus, or a technique we should not call ‘calculating.’ But would it be *wrong*? (Is a coronation *wrong*?)” (*PI*, 226e–227e).

What is fascinating in this account in which we think of rightness and wrongness is that these feelings seem to be grounded in something natural and something conventional. If everyone believes twice two is five, we must also imagine that what they mean by calculation is not what we mean by it—in other words, the sense of rightness and wrongness comes from feeling that this is not just a matter of “shared beliefs,” for other things that elsewhere Wittgenstein calls “the apparatus of everyday life” must be different, too.

Finally, consider one of the last three passages in *PI* (para. 230^e):

If the formation of concepts can be explained by facts of nature, should we not be interested, not in grammar, but rather in that in nature, which is the basis of grammar?—Our interest certainly includes the correspondence between concepts and very general facts of nature. (Such facts as mostly do not strike us because of their generality.) But our interest does not fall back upon these possible causes of the formation of concepts; we are not doing natural science; nor yet natural history—since we can also invent fictitious natural history for our purposes.

The ideas here are of rightness, fitness, of our expressions carrying greater natural weight in such a way that we might come to feel that our language and world are in harmony with each other. Laugier (2011) elaborates that the issue for Austin, Cavell, and Wittgenstein is not that of a correspondence between a statement and some fact in the external world to which the statement refers; not even of correctness; but rather of the *appropriateness* of a statement within the circumstances—the fact that it is proper. Thus how we

choose and value words is not about having a common framework for interpreting the meaning of what is said but what the person means in saying them—the sense in which one’s words are an expression of what matters to one. The whirl of organism refers in part to what Austin characterized as made possible by our ordinary language because it “embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing and the connections they have found worth marking in the lifetimes of many generations” (Austin [1956] 1961, 182), and partly because we share a sense of the natural, as in Austin’s example that one cannot say, “I stepped on the baby inadvertently.” It is not that the sentence is not grammatical or that words cannot be made to mean; rather, the sense of life that would support them slips away in such a construction: it violates our sense of what is the natural stance one takes to a child. Instead, if one had said, “I stepped on the child accidentally,” that would be a possible construction, for such accidents do happen. Here Austin shows the intimacy between language and the world by bringing expression in harmony with action that alludes to distinctions (*inadvertently* and *accidentally*) as natural to our way of being in the world.

If the natural and the social thus mutually absorb each other, do they leave room for recognition of the singularity of the individual? We saw earlier that Canguilhem saw the individual as a site of novelty. Given his notion of disease as an experiment with life, he was interested in variations internal to the individual. Recently, Caroline Humphrey (2008) perceptively argued that “[c]ertain kinds of anthropological experience seem to require the conceptualization of singular analytical subjects: individual actors who are constituted as subjects in particular circumstances.” The circumstances she is alluding to are “the advent of new regimes, convulsions wrought by war, schisms of former social wholes, and, in general, the overturning of accepted patterns of intelligibility and the advent of radical new ideas” (Humphrey 2008, 357).

One might think that there is some similarity in Canguilhem’s attention to the individual precisely because disease or old age invites experimentation with norms, normality, and normativity, and with Humphrey’s attention to collective upheavals that leave their traces in public archives through the work of individuals. Yet there are interesting differences, since for Humphrey the individual becomes a subject through a *decision event*, as in the example of the lives of specific individuals she discusses in the case of the revolution and counterrevolution in Inner Mongolia in 1926–30. Here individuals appear through their allegiance to or their betrayal of changing regimes and charismatic leaders. But whereas for Canguilhem disease is a normal part of life, and the new norms with which an individual experiments are embedded in his or her everyday, for Humphrey it is in leaving the everyday that the individual becomes a subject.

The vision of singular individuals is strikingly different in scholars who take their inspiration from Wittgenstein and Cavell. Laugier (2011) asserts that whereas for Wittgenstein the central question was the common use of language, Cavell makes a new question arise from that problematic—that of the relation between an individual speaker

and the linguistic community: “For Cavell, this leads to a reintroduction of the voice into philosophy and to a redefinition of subjectivity in language precisely on the basis of the relationship of the individual voice to the linguistic community: the relation of a voice to voices” (Laugier 2011, 633). Thus for Cavell an abiding question is how one finds one’s own voice in one’s history. Cavell repeatedly evokes Emerson’s essay on self-reliance to show that finding this voice is a matter not of a dramatic decision that would mark a before and an after but rather of learning how to align my voice with that of the others within a form of life. Heidegger (1962), too, had argued that an identification with the “we” that simply reproduces the common chatter does not allow an authentic (in the sense of mine) self to appear, but he also recognized that even when the same words are repeated as habit, when others repeat what I have said, my words get thickened through such social usage; they acquire greater reality. For Cavell, too, the question of singularity of the individual is not that of escaping the shared life in language but of being able to confront one’s culture with one’s own imagination of one’s words and one’s life. This could lead to the receiving of one’s voice as a gift from one’s culture; or, in the alternate case in which my voice is stifled through institutional arrangements, it might take the character of a rebuke. Cavell takes the former as demonstrated in the Hollywood comedy of remarriage and the latter in the case of denial of the woman’s voice in the genre of such films as *Gaslight*. The question is whether one’s culture is able to receive the individuality of the voice. Cavell grows this idea later by a profound analysis of perlocutionary objectives contained in passionate statements and wants philosophy to remain open to the order of law through a better understanding of expressions that carry illocutionary force when convention and context are in place, and open to the disorder of desire through perlocutionary force when expression must create a new context and carry the uniqueness of the individual voice. There might be some resonances between Humphrey’s contrast between “the situation” and “the event,” but for Cavell it is crucial that we recognize the fragility of the real in both cases. The everyday is not overcome in the process of individuation but appears as the natural expression through which desire finds expression, as in the classic declaration of love in which it is imperative that the “I” and the “you” are signaled out as unique rather than as representatives of institutional power. As Cavell (2005) says, if in declaring my love for you I am counting on institutional power (my wealth or patrimonial power) to ensure that you say yes, this fragile situation becomes a way of stifling your voice rather than risking a rejection because my desire is not answered. The risks to which statements with perlocutionary force are open shows that everyday life harbors within itself the possibility that modes of subjectivation might occur in circumstances that are most ordinary from the perspective of the collective and yet hold great risks for the individual, such as one finds in the vicissitudes of the erotic event or in the disorders of desire.

The specific event, such as the experience of falling in love or falling into madness or encountering violence, reveals one’s vulnerability not only to an external world but also to the other with whom one inhabits the world. Even more terrifying is the thought that

the fragility of our agreements reveals everyday life *as a whole* to be vulnerable, as we argued earlier. Laugier (2011) argues forcefully that this fragility is not only about our experience as subjective or opaque to us, but also about the character of the real. One of the threats of skepticism—one that gives everyday life sometimes a trancelike character—is that it cannot be resolved by giving more evidence about questions that besiege one when one is in the grip of the skeptical moment. Cavell argues that it is only by accepting the finitude and fallibility of our existence as human, the flesh-and-blood character of the concrete other, that skepticism’s doubts can be calmed. Although it would take another paper to show how the fragility and vulnerability of the real brings Cavell into the vicinity of Freud, we might indicate the direction of such an argument from Jacques Lacan’s ([1986] 1992) remarks on the precarious nature of reality:¹³

From a Freudian point of view, the reality principle is presented as functioning in a way that is essentially precarious. . . . No previous philosophy has gone so far in that direction. It is not that reality is called into question; it is certainly not called into question in the way that the idealists did so. Compared to Freud the idealists of the philosophical tradition are small bear indeed, for in the last analysis they don’t seriously contest that famous reality, they merely tame it. Idealism consists in affirming that we are the ones who gave shape to reality, and that there is no point in looking any further. It is a comfortable position. Freud’s position . . . is something very different. . . . Reality is precarious. And it is precisely to the extent that access to it is precarious that the commandments which trace its path are so tyrannical. (Lacan [1986] 1992, 30)

For both Lacan and Cavell the access to the real is precarious: the commandments do not protect us from being besieged by skeptical doubts, and though both would agree that we are the ones who give shape to our reality, this is only the beginning of the story and not its end. The role that defenses play in Lacan might be compared with the defenses we set up against the everyday in Cavell, which is why securing the everyday is an achievement. We move to a related issue—that of understanding how the notion of the limit becomes the point at which we can see the folding of the natural and the social coming apart.

Let us consider briefly Wittgenstein’s “ethnological” examples, which are invariably of imaginary tribes or otherwise hypothetical individuals and which give *PI* an eerie character mirroring the trancelike character that everyday life sometime takes (see Das 1998). Thus, consider the imagined tribe in which there is no grammatical expression for the first person, or the imaginary tribe in which people act as if others have no soul or that they cannot dissimulate. One kind of interpretation of these imaginary tribes veers toward the idea that the function of conjuring these tribes whose interests and activities differ from ours is not to help us see how these tribes are “other minded,” but rather to illuminate aspects of our own forms of life. Thus Lear (1989; 2006) explicitly states that the sketches of the imaginary tribes who are, say, “meaning blind” or who lack the

concept of a first-person perspective should not be seen as a genuine possibility or sites for future fieldwork, but conceptual forms of thinking about our own lives. Does this mean that for Wittgenstein no other form of life except our own is imaginable? We suggest that what these examples show is precisely how the world might become lost to us even as we live in it. Wittgenstein's particular picture of this is that of our sense of the natural way of doing things being put into question when words, as Wittgenstein says, are drained of life. "We might say: in all cases, what one means by 'thought' is what is *alive* in the sentence. That without which it is dead, a mere sequence of sounds or written shapes" (Wittgenstein 1967, para. 143). But it is not only thought that is alive in a sentence but the possibility of the projection of words, of their being received, or of the way that they might be abandoned, becoming merely frozen slides, as the ethnographic examples from Das (2007) about women who could only withdraw their words in the face of violence that seemed to have destroyed the fabric not only of the social but also of the natural show. This is one way of reading the chapters in which several authors of this book try to convey what it is to lose one's world. Healing, then, is not some kind of a return to the everyday after all accounts have been settled, but being able to inhabit this very space of devastation once again in a mode that Laugier (2013) and Han (2012) characterize as the stance of care. There are no guarantees that our language can regain life; indeed, one could be consigned to inhabiting the world as a spectral figure, a ghost. Yet the chapters show how embracing an idea of life and of death that goes beyond the notions of the biological as defined in science and technology studies will help anthropology to be genuinely open to the pathways that still remain open for reimagining human life as expressing the social and the natural in their mutual absorption as well as the fragility that comes from the ever-present possibility that the fine alignment between these two modes will be lost. Does a privileging of care as a mode of being in the world negate the search for social justice, or somehow distract from the forms of cruelty that modern states and neoliberal markets end up imposing on societies? The chapters in this book will show that the darkness of our times is made palpable precisely in the mode in which we can see how large events such as wars and occupations are nestled with the so-called small events, and that it is their mutual braiding with each other that defines the texture of living.

If the idea of limits in Wittgenstein shows that we cannot know in advance the scale and shape of the human body, the human voice, or the way forms of life might nurture forms of dying, the concept of thresholds, which plays a vital role for Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, makes a shift toward tracing the varying intensities, and the waxing and waning, of the forces through which life is reconstituted. Deleuze and Guattari (1980) describe the self as the threshold, a becoming between two multiplicities that are themselves made of contingent assemblages between the biological and the social, points of singularity in which several temporalities coalesce. Taking this idea into the anthropological register, Bhrigupati Singh argues that the concept can be animated ethnographically, demonstrating this through his attentiveness to varying intensities that relationships take over a period of time (Singh 2014). Thus such affects as intense political

enmity at one threshold of life can become religious intimacy at another threshold due to impersonal forces such as the force exerted by nomadic gods and spirits. Instead of identities in which we are locked, Singh shows the dynamic quality of the agon that allows relations to be sustained in the everyday. Even powerful agencies such as the state are shown to embody contradictory aspects of punishment and nurture, now becoming the punitive god Varuna and now the friendly god Mitra of Indo-European mythology. If the notion of limit to forms of life shows what cannot be absorbed in the notion of life (madness, disintegration of the body through extreme violence), the notion of thresholds offers the possibility that something new might emerge to find once again the capacity to sustain life. Finding as founding, as Cavell would say, rather than searching for secure foundations in either nature or culture takes us to unaccustomed paths through which we seek to trace our contemporary conditions anthropologically, philosophically, and simply by learning to inhabit our everyday through mutual acknowledgment.

This concept note that we have written is not a summary of the chapters that follow; nor does it provide the secure framework within which authors were invited to write. Instead, it has emerged from our rereading of the authors we think have shaped contemporary thought on questions of life and death. It was written after we had read and absorbed the chapters that follow, and so one way of reading it is in the mode of return, when we hope it will become apparent how much our interpretation of the issues we discuss in Lock, Canguilhem, Wittgenstein, and Cavell, or pathways into their texts that we found, were guided by the manner in which all the authors of this volume chose to engage their respective ethnographies and other kinds of empirical data. For such rich stimulation we can only say, Thinking is indeed an act of thanking.

NOTES

1. Several notable anthologies on medical anthropology and the anthropology of biomedicine and edited volumes on topics as wide-ranging as global health, subjectivity, and post-colonial disorders illustrate that the very subject matter of health, disease, and suffering impels anthropologists to go beyond disciplinary boundaries, even as they rely on these boundaries as identifying fully formed fields of inquiry. For example, see Biehl et al. 2007; DeVecchio Good et al. 2008; Good et al. 2010; and Lock and Nguyen 2010. Arthur Kleinman, from his work on neurasthenia and the Cultural Revolution in China (Kleinman 1986) and his formulation with colleagues Das and Lock of the notion of social suffering (Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997) to his most recent work on caregiving (Kleinman 2010; Kleinman 2014), clearly breaks disciplinary boundaries and embraces a notion of life beyond that of biological life. Michael Jackson, too, in his *Life within Limits*, also breaks these disciplinary boundaries by attending to the elusiveness of well-being and tying it to the sense of existential discontent that can haunt us (Jackson 2011).

2. Our purpose here is not to give a comprehensive review of this literature, as available in Helmreich 2011. Instead, we are drawing attention to tendencies within the literature that we see as particularly significant.

3. However, see Michael Fischer, who has explored the ways in which technoscience and massive social traumas can challenge our standing languages. Such challenges, he argues, are experienced within social theory, which must pay detailed attention to the life that is forming around us. For Fischer, anthropology must remain an open venture, dissatisfied with overarching theories and broad claims that are about the alienation of the technicization of life, or globalization. See Fischer 2003 and 2007.

4. However, see Singh 2012 on the much older conceptions of the dual character of sovereignty as punitive and protective in the Indo-European mythic imagination.

5. We question the recent fascination with and concern over bioterrorism and DIY biology as generating the primary challenge to global health, ethics, and security as Bennett et al. (2009) and Collier et al. (2004) suggest. For it is not at all clear that such concerns over bioterrorism are accorded the same privileged status for the political and ethical across the globe. Moreover, bioterrorism or “terrorism” is stable only if a conventional geopolitics and politics of emergency rooted in the United States is the taken-for-granted way of seeing the world, such that deaths from “war” provoke a justification based on necessity, whereas terrorism inspires horror and fascination. In his acute analysis, Talal Asad turns the mirror back on the conventional discourse of terrorism and fascination with suicide bombing to ask what moral assumptions are embedded in this discourse and what moral responses are assumed in this distinction of “just war” and “terrorism” (Asad 2007).

6. We might compare our approach to Michael Walzer’s discussion of thick substantive morality and minimal morality, the latter of which could be identified in responding only to the most offensive injustices (Walzer 1994). Yet Walzer argues that minimalism can be identified in reiterated rules and principles across substantive thick moral cultures that reflect different histories and different versions of the world. We, however, would take issue with the idea of multiple versions of one world, and suggest that acknowledging the many-worlds problem entails a genuine challenge for thought as the otherness cannot be tamed into representational difference (see Das et al. 2014).

7. However, see the fascinating discussion between a blind philosopher and a sighted one on whether statements on seeing convey experiential knowledge or only propositional knowledge for the blind (Magee and Malligan 1995).

8. Duana Fullwiley’s work on *localized* biologies is perhaps one of the most significant innovations on Lock’s concept. Fullwiley, however, is exploring biologists’ definition of biological difference in Senegal as made possible through the territorial boundaries of the nation-state created under French colonialism (Fullwiley 2011).

9. The French philosopher Jean Gayon also sees the problem of individuality as a thread running throughout Canguilhem’s work—as axiological, ontological, and in the relationship of life and knowledge (Gayon 1998; see also Lecourt 1998).

10. It should be evident that our view of life as an analytical category is not derived from the perspective of a vitalist philosophy, which would take life primarily in terms of living organic matter. However, we find it helpful in this discussion of Canguilhem to note that Canguilhem himself was drawn to vitalism—not in terms of defining a set of properties to life, but rather as more a “method, or a commitment to an ethical system more than a theory,” that keeps life and knowledge in an open relation. For a further discussion, please see the chapter titled “Aspects of Vitalism” in Canguilhem’s *Knowledge of Life* and Paola Marrati and

Todd Meyer's excellent introduction to that work, translated and edited by Daniela Ginsburg and Stefanos Geroulanos (Canguilhem 2008).

11. We may note, however, that the impact of narrative medicine as a pedagogic tool in medical education today has shifted more attention to the noncognitive dimensions of medical care, and that it is widely recognized that convivial participation cannot be taught in the same way that the nervous system can be taught.

12. Our intention is not to review the large corpus of literature that has emerged on the idea of form of life but rather to show how thinking of both—*forms* and *life* together—might take the discussion on life in a different direction than that of the biopolitical state or sovereignty. For a thoughtful analysis of the role and place of Wittgenstein in anthropological discussions, see Salgues 2008. Salgues is particularly attentive to the differences in the posing of epistemological questions in the United States as opposed to France, and the traffic between these two academic cultures.

13. Although we are not aware of any published sources in which Cavell engages Lacan directly despite his (Cavell's) deep interest in showing where his differences with Freud rest, one of us (Das) attended some of Cavell's seminars on Lacan in the late 1990s in which the vulnerability of human action came up for discussion.

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