

Recently, Eric Olson has claimed that an organism is “a special kind of event, roughly the sum of the metabolic activities the organism’s parts are caught up in”, being individualized by “an internal plan and a well-defined boundary” (Olson (1997), 136 f.). I shall argue that the “internal plan” that Olson refers to is ontologically best understood in terms of a special *form* of life that is maintained in centered individual processes of self-determination. In order to elucidate the concept of an organic life form as a well defined process, I will draw on Kant’s critical theory of life. In his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant famously described the status of organisms as “heautonomous” (Kant, CPJ, AA 5:186). Drawing on Hans Jonas’ conception of form as being essential to organisms, I shall oppose Varela’s view that an organism is a “centerless identity”, which is “non-substantially localized” (Varela (1994), 23) arguing that – although we must conceive of organisms as operationally closed entities and as dynamic processes – we need a unifying principle that makes understandable the specific biographic abilities of an organism, be it an animal or a person. For that reason, I will build on Michael Thompson’s theory of life forms. According to this view, biological “[i]ndividual states and episodes [...] must always be realizations of a *capacity* that is characteristic of the life form of the [...] individual organism.” (Thompson (2004), 71.) Against Varela’s account of organism as a “centerless identity”, I shall endorse Thompsons thesis that “every thought of an individual organism as alive is mediated by thought of the life-form it bears.” (Thompson (2008), 81) I will argue that the concept of an organic life form allows to maintain an organism’s diachronic and synchronic identity since it concerns natural historic judgments of the specific organism, that is its ‘natural-historical biography’.