Phenomenology of death: subjectivity and nature in Husserl's genetic phenomenology

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Chapter 1: First and third person

In this first chapter I will introduce some basic concepts in Husserlian phenomenology that will be essential for the development of my thesis, and sketch out the tension between Husserlian transcendental idealism and naturalism. In the context of Husserl's critique of naturalistic descriptions of consciousness made in the third person, phenomenology arises as a first-personal eidetic analysis of conscious experience that puts into question the foundational character of psychology and natural science. In this context, limit-cases such as death pose a problem for Husserl insofar as they cannot be experienced intuitively in the first person. They would be the indication of a limit for subjective constitution, and therefore of something that remains external to consciousness. This is problematic because it would mean admitting something like a thing-in-itself, thus falling back into a scheme that phenomenology aimed to overcome. Taking limit-cases in their significance as moments of passage between consciousness and unconsciousness, they cannot be analysed through the straightforward scheme that normally characterizes phenomenology's method of inquiry. Because they are not a proper object of constitution, such limit-cases pose a challenge to the phenomenological principles that lay at the basis of Husserl's philosophy: first-personal access, lack of presuppositions and intuition as foundation. Husserl's response to this concern is to postulate the immortality of the subject–the monad, as he calls it here—as a solution that would preserve the priority of subjectivity over objectivity. In this sense, limit-cases, amongst which I will focus on death, can serve as a leading clue to explore the limits of the method and a possible reconfiguration of the gap between first- and third-personal perspectives on subjectivity.

1.1 Phenomenology as a response to naturalism

There are different ways of answering the question of what phenomenology is, but it is a common *locus* to trace its development back to Husserl's dispute with naturalism, and there are good reasons for it. From the *Logical Investigations* all the way to his late unpublished manuscripts, Husserl's rejection of the naturalistic

view takes on many different forms but never stops being an important issue. Now, there are many different types and degrees of naturalism but, broadly speaking, we could say that naturalism seeks to explain the mind in merely physical or causal terms. Ontologically, a strong naturalistic view affirms that everything from mental processes to social norms can be reduced to physical entities and processes. Methodologically, it holds that the best way to study the world is through the method of the natural sciences. Husserl battles against these two dimensions of naturalism all his life. From early on, he understands, firstly, that what is truly given in an original manner in experience is not exhausted by physical entities. If that were the case, we would have no way of justifying the universal validity of things like logical and mathematical truths. Instead, these would be considered mere psychological laws that emerge from experience and can eventually change. In the *Prolegomena to the Logical Investigations* Husserl extensively criticizes this psychologism, mainly because he thinks it leads to relativism. Against this view, he claims that logical laws are ideal objects that have a being of their own, even if they can only appear to a consciousness (Hua 18). Secondly, Husserl believed that a naturalistic view ultimately rests on unjustified presuppositions that need to be clarified, first of all, by philosophy. For example, the universal thesis that all valid knowledge must come from perceptual experience cannot itself be justified through perceptual experience (Hua 3-1, 43; Husserl 1983, 37). It is the task of philosophy to clarify those principles in the first place. If naturalism believes that physical reality is the object of all true knowledge, phenomenology will inquire about what *reality* means in the first place; if naturalism appeals to causal processes to explain our experience, phenomenology will ask about the meaning of *causality*. In a sense, phenomenology deals with meaning, but not just linguistic meaning; rather, the question of meaning puts into question the very basic forms of our experience, the very *being* of the world. It does so by approaching the analyses of experience without any presuppositions, going back to "the things themselves" and their original ways of being given. This is what the "principle of all principles" expresses:

> *that each intuition affording [something] in an originary way is a legitimate source of knowledge,* that *whatever presents itself to us in "Intuition" in an originary way (*so to

> speak, in its actuality in person*) is to be taken simply as what it affords itself as,* but *only within the limitations in which it affords itself there*. (Hua 3-1, 51; Husserl 1983, 44)

This might not seem so different from the principles of naturalistic science, since it too claims to proceed merely through intuition or 'observation'. However, as Husserl points out, a scientific description of a perceptual object often includes elements that are not actually present to intuition, such as the appeal to 'vibratory frequencies' to explain the perception of a melody, or to the variety of a tree to describe it (Hua 19/1, 647). For Husserl, intuition points to what is actually present. It is in a sense narrower, and in another sense broader, since it includes also the intuition of essences, and in general anything that can be contained in the specific way it is given.

The way to inquire about that givenness will be through an examination of first-personal experience. While the reductive kind of empiricism that Husserl criticizes will attempt to explain, for example, perceptive experience appealing to the causal effect that sensory data produce in our senses, phenomenology will draw the attention to certain elements that make up the structure of our experience and that cannot be traced back to those available to the third-personal point of view of science. If we take the paradigmatic example of the perception of a cube, in analysing our experience from said point of view we notice that what we actually receive as sensory data is not the whole cube but only certain sides of it. It could always be the case that when we turned to the back of the cube we find a round side, or nothing at all—that it was a hologram, etc., but that doesn't keep us from experiencing simply a whole cube. This means that in some way we presuppose what we don't see as being coherent with the experience of what we do. Husserl calls these 'presuppositions' co-intended or co-meant (*Mitgemeinte*) (Hua 1, 85; Husserl 1960, 48) aspects of what is experienced. When we experience an object, consciousness intends it, which means it is directed to it through an act. But objects are always given through profiles or adumbrations (*Abschattungen*), which means that our ability to refer to an object as a whole entails the capacity to bring together in a unity the seen and the unseen aspects of it. If it turned out that the cube I intended as actually present was in fact a hologram, my prior intentions would be

failed ones and I would have to correct my own experience, namely admitting that I wasn't seeing a cube but an illusion. The non-perceived sides of an object form what Husserl called its *internal horizon*, and the realm of other objects that this one refers to form its *external horizon*. Horizons are necessary yet subjective traits of our experience. They show we have a key role in how we perceive the world. This is how the subject, in Husserl's terms, *constitutes* reality. The *intentionality* of consciousness, which is its necessary directedness towards something, is one of Husserl's ground-breaking ideas. To put it simply, he understood that consciousness is not an entity, and therefore not a recipient for external things manifesting themselves in it, but simply the way in which these things are unveiled. This is why phenomenology can never be regarded as a traditional form of idealism: the objective world is never created or even co-created, but rather illuminated by consciousness in its own way of being. Because consciousness is always consciousness of something, and so always directed towards something that isn't itself, it can disclose the objectivities it is directed to in a better or poorer way, in a more or less faithful way, in relation to both its internal and external horizons. Although Husserl does not use the term 'normativity' to describe consciousness in a direct manner, one can interpret the search for fulfilment of intentions in this way; and his own late reflections on normality confirm this interpretation. When I perceive an object at a distance, or in a poorly lit room, I have an experience of it that is less faithful than the one I would have had if I had seen it in the daylight and up close. The fact that consciousness pursues a goal by being directed towards something is what makes intentional consciousness an inherently normative consciousness. Lastly, the criterion that determines what makes a better or worse disclosure of the object, namely its sense or *noema*, although it refers to the proper mode of givenness of the object in question, cannot itself be considered a *datum*, a part of the object's materiality. It is for Husserl an unreal component of the experience of the thing, born of the correlation with the intending act. Because we perceive (imagine, remember, love, etc.) objects under a certain meaning, i.e. we see a book, a desk, a person, and not just a bundle of sense-data, consciousness is revealed as being meaning-constituting.

It is the focus put on these subjective conditions for the experienciability of anything at all that makes phenomenology a transcendental reflection. And since these are conditions given *within* experience, the transcendental standpoint is closely linked to a first-personal approach. What is referred to as the normative structure of our experience–that is its teleological orientation to fulfilment and truth—is what transcendental analyses conducted from a first-personal perspective exhibits, and what cannot be accounted for from the naturalistic perspective of science.

In the context of phenomenology, then, consciousness can be characterized as being intentional, normative and constituting. It is intentional because it is always directed towards something, and so it aims at a certain fulfilment. It is normative because this search for fulfilment can be more or less achieved according to the degrees of givenness of the object. And it is constituting because it grasps unities of meaning and not mere loose data. Meanings are neither created by consciousness altogether nor can be found as things-in-themselves in the world; they are rather located in the encounter of consciousness and world, of subject and object—that is to say, in what Husserl calls 'correlation'. These features of consciousness are not such as can be observed in the third person, but rather they become evident in the type of first-personal reflection that phenomenology carries out, and therefore they contest the naturalistic understanding of conscious experience. Considered as the basic way to account for and explain conscious experience, the characterisation of consciousness as intentional, normative, and constituting, excludes the naturalistic perspective.

1.2 Phenomenology as transcendental inquiry

One of Husserl's earlier recognitions is that it doesn't make sense to say something can be given without it being given to a subject. Therefore, experience is always subjective experience: "*What is must be able to be brought into being; every possible object, understood in the broadest sense, has a possible intuition as a correlate, in which it, as it is, would be intuitable* (..)" [Was ist, muss sich zur Gegebenheit bringen lassen; jeder mögliche Gegenstand, das Wort in weitesten

Sinn <verstanden>, hat als Korrelat eine mögliche Anschauung, in der er, so wie er ist, anschaulich würde] (Hua 36, 94) As Tengelyi glosses: "*This 'principle of identifiability' is a premise of Husserl's train of thought that is not justified. However, one might think that it does not need to be justified, since it results directly from the basic beliefs of phenomenology*" (Tengelyi 2014b, 205)[3]. It would make no sense to speak of something that is but cannot be given in conscious experience; this would be something like a thing in-itself, a notion that Husserl rejected strongly (Hua 7, 232). At the same time, there cannot be a consciousness without it being consciousness *of* something, since the very definition of consciousness is, as we have seen, this reference to something other, i.e., intentionality. This realization is what constitutes the *a priori of correlation*, a self-evident meta-principle that states that "*whatever exists, whether it has a concrete or abstract, real or ideal, meaning, has its manners of self-givenness and, on the side of the ego, its manners of intention in modes of validity*" (Hua 6, 161; Husserl 1970, 166). It doesn't make sense, then, to speak of a reality that is beyond the scope of consciousness, which is what the thing-in-itself stands for. These kind of realist assumptions ultimately rest on a naturalistic point of view, as Husserl clearly saw when discussing the dispute between realism and idealism and its overcoming by transcendental idealism (Hua 5, 154). As long as we are thinking of consciousness as merely natural, the question of whether it relates properly or not to the outside world makes sense, while if we consider it as transcendental we would have to recognize, following the principle of correlation, that there is nothing "outside" of it which it should properly accommodate:

> *An* absolute reality is no more or less valid than a round square*. "Reality" and "world" here are just headings for certain valid unities of sense, namely, unities of the "sense" related to certain connections of the absolute, pure consciousness*. (Hua 3-1, 120; Husserl 1983, 129)

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[3] Dieses »Prinzip der Ausweisbarkeit« ist eine nicht weiter begründete Prämisse von Husserls Gedankengang. Allerdings ist es, so könnte man meinen, auch nicht begründungsbedürftig, da es sich aus den Grundüberzeugungen der Phänomenologie unmittelbar ergibt.

The way to reach this pure consciousness is through the performance of the phenomenological reduction, the method whose formulation marks Husserl's so-called transcendental turn in *Ideas 1*. After having suspended any interest or belief in the existence of the world through the performance of the *epoché*, we encounter what is given as phenomena, that is, as a correlate to our intentional activity, and focus on *how* it is given. Understanding the world and objectivity as phenomena means understanding them as meaning-formations that refer to ourselves as the ones that give or to whom that meaning is given; in Husserl's words, as the ones that *constitute* that meaning. The reduction (from the Latin *reducere*: to lead back) then, reconducts phenomena to the constitutive activity of subjectivity. It is in this sense that we have to reject the idea of an absolute reality, a world in-itself beyond consciousness[4]. But this is precisely how we understand *nature* in the natural attitude: something that exceeds and precedes consciousness, that from which we come from. When we perform the phenomenological reduction, we reveal *the true nature of nature*: its being a correlate to our constitutive activity, and so a constituted meaning. This results in swiftly dismissing any pretension of originarity given by science to natural processes, and considering ourselves natural beings only in a secondary, constituted way. But what does it mean for nature to be a constituted meaning? Let's take for example the perception of a seemingly natural thing. An explorer hiking through a virgin area might encounter a mountain that no one has seen before, and think they are coming across 'brute nature'. However, if only because what they see is "a mountain" and not a manifold of sensory data, what they perceive is already meaningful and not just brute nature. In fact, if what we mean by 'nature' is something beyond the meaningful organization of our experience, then nature is inaccessible by principle. Even if minimal, this organization of experience points to the subject as the source of meaning-constitution, and the reduction makes this constitution thematic.

[4] Husserl recognizes Kant as the author of the Copernican revolution that inaugurates the transcendental tradition, but he is very critical of certain aspects of his theory. The distinction between phenomenon and thing-in-itself is one of them, since in his view it perpetuates a useless "metaphysics" (Hua 7, 235).

From the standpoint of transcendental phenomenology, nature and its self-sufficiency are constituted senses. But this does not mean that it is contingent that we think of nature as independent or in-itself; rather, this is how nature is necessarily given. And with this realization a tension is born between how nature is disclosed and the disclosure itself. This is the tension that leads to the aforementioned dichotomy between reducing consciousness to nature or the other way around; where Husserl opts for the latter.

While showing the constituted character of all transcendence, the transcendental reduction at the same time points to the realm of constituting subjectivity as that which is required in order for there to be transcendence, that is to say, as the conditions of possibility for the experience of transcendence in general. Transcendental or constituting subjectivity is thus defined as that which is in principle distinct from constituted objectivities in the world, and this distinction is what will generate what Husserl calls the 'paradox of human subjectivity', which I will explore in depth in the next chapter. The mutual exclusion and, at the same time, the interdependence of transcendental and empirical subjectivity represent a problematic knot in Husserl's account of subjectivity. This problematic division relates, in turn, to the distinction between first and third person, and between the subjective and objective poles of experience. If anything that is given is given to a consciousness, it follows that there is always a subject of experience, a transcendental consciousness, subjectivity, or life. Whether this subject is an ego, that is to say, whether the transcendental realm has an egological structure, is a matter of interpretation and is subject to changes across Husserl's works. However, it is experienced and disclosed only through a first-personal analysis since "*To be a subject is to be in the mode of being aware of oneself*" [Subjektsein ist, in der Weise seiner selbst bewusst zu sein, zu sein.] (Hua 14, 151).

Insofar as the transcendental features of experience can only be disclosed in the first person, we are faced with two types of problems. Firstly, the problem of describing the transcendental subject, which requires that we objectify what is by principle non objectifiable, what is in essence different than an object. Secondly, the problem of accounting for the constitution of what seems not to be given in the

first-person, which would be the case of death and limits in general. Husserl's phenomenological reflection shows that I, as transcendental, do not die. Death is never *mine* because it happens to my empirical self, to my body as a thing. In a sense, death happens to me in the third person. I do not undergo death because that would mean surviving it. And yet, there are a number of other experiences I do not undergo in a thematic sense. As Husserl's genetic analysis will gradually show, a large part of what can be counted as first-personal experience happens "in the background", in the passive realm, where every constituted object is passively pre-given and there is not a formed person yet —it is strictly speaking, pre- or im- personal. So how should we interpret the first-personal perspective?

1.3 First-personal perspective

In "Qu'est-ce que'une phénoménologie en première personne?", Natalie Depraz (2014) identifies two criteria for identifying what in the phenomenological tradition is presented as the first person: first, a negative criterion that indicates that the first person is what is given in a different mode than a thing; and second, a linguistic criterion according to which the first person is the one that can say "I". Depraz finds both these criteria problematic and goes on to challenge the notion of the first-personal approach in traditional phenomenology. Attempting a minimal description of the first person, Dan Zahavi separates the first-personal access from its articulation in a personal pronoun, and claims that phenomenology is focused on understanding first-personal perspective as "*the distinctive way in which mental states are given to the subject whose states they are*" (Zahavi 2006, 13 quoting Shoemaker 1996, 157). The common element is a certain connection between the first person and the realm of immanent awareness, which is a crucial element of phenomenological analysis.

In a trivial sense, anything can be first-personal as long as I perceive it and reflect on it, but when phenomenology stresses the importance of the first-personal approach, it aims at uncovering a dimension that third-personal science excludes when trying to grasp the true, objective sense of the world. A first-personal access allows us to reflect on the meaning of certain basic elements of our experience like, for example, time. There is a lot that science can tell us about time; but its true

nature, its meaning, is not in its objective expressions but in the *experience* of time, which is essentially subjective. However, the subjective or immanent character of such experiences should not lead to the conclusion that these are merely private experiences: their validity for every subjectivity taking part in the transcendental community can be shown, but for Husserl this must always be done by keeping a foothold in primal experience.

This leads us to another element that makes a first-personal access a privileged one: its immediacy. For Husserl, consciousness and reality are given in essentially different ways, and while objects are given as dubitable and transcendent, the mode of givenness of *cogitationes* is immanent and apodictic. The first person is thus intimately tied with the validity of phenomenology's findings. As Husserl states in *Ideas 1*:

> *Thus in every manner it is clear that whatever is there for me in the world of physical things is necessarily only a* presumptive actuality *and, on the other hand, that I* myself*, for whom it is there (I, when the "part of me" belonging to the world of physical things is excluded) am absolute actuality or that the present phase of my mental processes is an absolute actuality, given by an unconditional, absolutely indefeasible positing (Hua 3-1, 86; Husserl 1983, 102)*

Even if one could object that Husserl's position here is still very Cartesian and that in later texts, he will become critical of it, the foundational character of first-person experience will never be put into question. In 1930 Husserl states: "*The original source of the "seeing" of all possibilities of a transcendental subject, however, always lies in myself, in the modifications of my own inwardness. Through modifications, possibilities also arise in a higher-level "intuition" as limit-cases*." (Hua/Mat 8, 105)[5]. This is in line with Husserl's insistence on phenomenology being a presuppositionless reflection, that is based solely on what is intuitively given. If we consider the principle of all principles presented earlier, we can appreciate that the criterion it provides is naturally related to this anchoring

[5] Die Urquelle der „Anschauung" für alle Möglichkeiten eines transzendentalen Subjekts liegt aber immer in mir selbst, in den Abwandlungen meiner eigenen Innerlichkeit. Möglichkeiten durch Abwandlungen ergeben sich auch in höherstufiger „Intuition" als Limesfälle.

in the first person, since it is in the first person that we find accountability for the evidence given by intuition. This idea will be important once the contrast with the Post-Husserlian French tradition is made explicit, since the main difference to explore there will be the gradual marginalisation of the first person as the intrinsic meaningfulness of the world becomes more important. This is a movement that, as we will see, characterizes Merleau-Ponty's philosophical development. Methodologically, it entails a deviation from transcendentalism, partly motivated by the various problems that arise from the insistence on anchoring all possible knowledge in first-personal evidence. First, as I have mentioned, the analysis of passivity will show that constitution occurs at a pre-personal level, and that functioning subjectivity, in its most fundamental form, is anonymous. The privilege of the first person is weakened by the fact that the mineness and self-awareness of these fundamental achievements is given only retrospectively (see Chapter 4). On the other hand, the attempt to isolate a pure first person, that is to say, a constituting but not constituted subject (*"I, when the 'part of me' belonging to the world of physical things is excluded"*) results in the explanatory gap between who I am as a subject and who I am as an object or entity in the world, which proves to bring some difficulties when considering the experience of my own body (chapter 7). Some phenomena, as is the case of birth and death, make this difficulty manifest and force us to reconsider the stark separation between a first and a third-personal approach. If death is understood as the passage to complete unconsciousness, then there is no subject *to whom* death is given, because death is the limit of said subject. And yet, arguably my own death concerns me in a special way that cannot be reduced to a third-personal understanding. Providing a phenomenological account of the *subjective* experience of death is a challenge that puts Husserlian philosophy to the test, since it involves answering some fundamental questions about the nature of this subject. In this context, Husserl will struggle to find a way to make sense of limit-cases while retaining the privilege of the first-personal point of view and the integrity of the transcendental principle. Eventually, as I will explore in this dissertation, these and other genetic questions will threaten the stability of these phenomenological principles by putting into

question the notion of subjectivity they depend on, namely the notion of a pure consciousness that can be considered independently of its worldly character.

1.4 Birth and death as natural phenomena and the challenge to the transcendental principle

By revealing that everything given is a correlate of our intentional activity, the reduction places intentionality at the most fundamental level. Without the constituting activity of consciousness nothing at all could ever be given. From this Husserl concludes that consciousness is absolute: everything rests on it, and it rests on nothing. However, certain facts of existence point to a limit of the constitutive activity of subjectivity insofar as we cannot become aware of them through first-personal intuition, and thus we cannot properly constitute them. This is the case with birth and death. So long as we encounter ourselves always in the midst of existence, having already began and being always still present, we cannot by principle live through our own limits. Does this mean that consciousness is not absolute in the end? For Husserl nothing can threaten the absolute character of consciousness, since something that would lay beyond its scope is nonsense, and even nonsense is a type of sense unveiled only by transcendental subjectivity (Hua 1, 117). This is an idea he stresses over and over again against the common notion of an independently existing reality or nature. Birth and death appear in this context as an upsetting element that reignites the tension at the heart of transcendental phenomenology. This is because they are what I will propose to call *natural phenomena*. Since they point to a realm of which we can make no more sense – namely, "*the problematic being before birth, death and 'after death'*" [das problematische Sein vor der Geburt, der Tod un das „nach dem Tod"] (Hua 15, 608)—and thus demarcate the limits of constitution, they seem to point in the direction of a dependency of consciousness on certain material conditions–i.e. embodiment—that would allow subjectivity to be operative[6]. Furthermore, the meaning that birth and death bestow upon our realm of experience comes from a

[6] At this stage, it is not clear if such "material conditions" should be cashed out in subpersonal or organic terms, or in constitutive or ontological terms. This vagueness can be considered a flaw of the naturalistic perspective (that often takes subpersonal conditions as ontological ones) rather than a lack of nuance in Husserl's part.

second-hand experience of them: we observe the birth and death of other people or we are told about birth and death in the world before even seeing it ourselves. The idea of a dependency of consciousness on bodily conditions both supports and is fully supported by a naturalist perspective on consciousness, and so it becomes a challenge to think of limit-cases in a phenomenological key or without falling into any kind of naturalistic explanation. As Roman Ingarden explains it, the essence of consciousness (intentionality) is radically different than that of material things, and so it cannot be causally conditioned by them (Ingarden 1975, 29). This, I believe, is the motivation behind Husserl's controversial claim about the eternity of the transcendental subject. It becomes quite clear when we analyse the first references to the immortality of consciousness in Husserl's work, that date back as far as 1910. I will present briefly the arguments he makes in this manuscript entitled "Die monadische Ansicht. Versuch, die Fakten wissenschaftlicher Erkenntnis ins Monadische umzudeuten" included in volume 42 of *Husserliana*, the first in which he addresses this topic. This is important because, even when later on Husserl refines and modifies his view on the matter, something of the motivation that lies behind his thinking about the issue remains. Husserl offers in this text a description of his monadological metaphysics inspired by Leibniz. He identifies individual consciousness as a monad, while committing to the idea of its eternal character: "*Each ego-consciousness is an 'immortal monad'*" [Jedes Ichbewusstsein is eine „unsterbliche Monade"] and therefore "*my individual consciousness is immortal*." [Mein individuelles Bewusstsein ist unsterblich] (Hua 42, 154). Further in the text, he refers to the immortality of souls [*die Seelen*], thus identifying souls with consciousness; although in later years he will always maintain a clear distinction between the two and affirm that the soul dies along with the body (Hua 35, 420) while consciousness proper does not. He goes on to explain that, even when monads cannot have had a beginning in time, they were not always "awaken" and this is the reason why there was a period in objective time where conscious humanity had not yet emerged. The notion of a sleeping monad that precedes birth and follows death will be recurrent in Husserl's dealings with these topics from now on, although the exact interpretation one should provide of this monadology remains unclear. We will see later on (chapter 5) that

monadological theory involves a lot of speculative features, but for now Husserl warns us that his account entails no “mysticism” but that it simply expresses transcendental idealism’s cornerstone notion of the spirit as necessarily preceding what is called nature in-itself:

> *What we want to say is only that there is nothing but "spirits" in the broadest sense when we understand the "is" in the absolute sense, and that bodies and other physical things are only in the sense of "nature", i.e. as units of experiential knowledge* (Hua 42, 158)[7].

This is the first of many references to the immortality of consciousness in explicit relation to the transcendental principle. Admitting a possible end of consciousness would mean posing a threat to its transcendental status, since it would point to a realm outside of its reach, namely that of nature in itself: *“the transcendental I cannot die; he can’t insofar as there is nothing exterior to him and death must precisely come from outside (…)”*[8] (Montavont 1999, 167). This becomes especially clear in this text, where Husserl talks about nature as the “rule of awakening” (*Regelung der Erscheinungen*) of souls (Hua 42, 158), meaning it is not something beyond consciousness but only a way of understanding consciousness’ development in objective time. There, he even refers to the immortality of the monad as a *solution* to the problem of explaining natural history in transcendental terms:

> *It is said that "nature" is eternal, and that nature had epochs in which no scientific ground allowed for the things of that epoch to receive psychic consciousness. And knowledge of nature also leaves the question open, if there weren’t alternative periods in natural history in which animals, animated organisms, already formed organic life, so souls (as attached to organisms) were present first and then annihilated. The task is to reinterpret all this given, founded, scientific knowledge into the monadic.* We solve this

[7] Was wir sagen wollen, ist nur dies, dass es gar nichts anderes gibt als „Geister“ im weitesten Sinn, wenn wir das „gibt“ im absoluten Sinn verstehen, und dass Leiber und sonstige physische Dinge nur sind im Sinn der „Natur“, d.h. als Einheiten der Erfahrungs-erkenntnis.

[8] Le moi transcendantal ne peut pas mourir; il ne le peut pas dans la mesure où il n’y a rien d’extérieur à lui et où précisément la mort doit venir de l’extérieur.

task by trying the following approach: Each ego-consciousness is an "immortal monad*".*[9] (Hua 42, 154) (emphasis is mine).

What seems to be explicitly expressed here is that the immortality of the constituting subject must be posited in order to avoid granting nature the status of the in-itself. In the same spirit, but now in the context of a reflection on time, he writes in a text from 1932:

Can I ever have started? Can having started make sense if it's not in time? I can have a first "awakening" and a final "awakening" - but a beginning as a streaming "living" present? Without it nothing has being, not the others implied in it or the world with human birth and human death. (Hua/Mat 8, 22)[10]

Again in 1936, he stresses this idea by moving in a circular manner and stating that, even when a functioning body is necessary to have a functioning ego; without this functioning ego, nothing -including embodiment- could be given:

But what is birth? The conditions of possibility of awaken life are fulfilled however by life itself. What are these conditions - a corporeality of an ego is there or a distant "analogue" of it. But corporeality dies - it becomes a mere body; corporeality of a certain concrete structure is a condition for life, for egoic being; but without life, without ego there is no world, no corporeality, no space-temporality etc. (Hua 29, 334)[11]

This could be summed up in the formula "*No death without life*" [Ohne Leben

[9] Die „Natur", heißt es nun, ist ewig, und die Natur hatte Epochen, in denen kein wissenschaftlicher Grund es gestattete, den Dingen dieser Epoche ein seelisches Bewusstsein einzufühlen. Und die Naturerkenntnis lässt es auch offen, ob nicht in der Geschichte der Natur Perioden abwechselten, in denen bald Tiere, beseelte Organismen, vorhanden waren, bald alles schon gebildete organische Leben, also Seelenleben (als an Organismen geknüpft) völlig vernichtet ⟨war⟩. Dies alles nun als ein Gegebenes begründeter, wissenschaftlicher Erkenntnis ins Monadische umzudeuten, das ist die Aufgabe. Wir lösen diese Aufgabe durch den Versuch des folgenden Ansatzes: Jedes Ichbewusstsein ist eine „unsterbliche Monade"

[10] Kann ich je angefangen haben? Hat Angefangen-Haben Sinn, wenn nicht als Haben in einer Zeit? Ich kann ein erstes „Erwachen" haben und ein letztes „Erwachen" – aber einen Anfang als strömend „lebendige" Gegenwart? Ohne sie hat nichts überhaupt Sein und so die in ihr implizierten Anderen und die Welt mit menschlicher Geburt und menschlichem Tod.

[11] Aber was ist Geburt? Bedingungen der Möglichkeit des Wachlebens erfüllen sich aber für das Leben selbst. Was sind das für Bedingungen - eine Leiblichkeit eines Ich ist da oder eines entfernten „Analogons" davon. Aber Leiblichkeit stirbt - es wird ein bloßer Körper, Körperlichkeit gewisser konkreter Struktur ist Bedingung für Leben, für Ichsein; aber ohne Leben, ohne Ichsein ist nicht Welt, ist nicht Körperlichkeit, ist nicht Raum-Zeitlichkeit etc.

kein Tod] (Hua 42, 22). Now, despite his emphatic defence of the idea of the immortality of the Ego, Husserl will struggle to find a suitable description of limit-cases in transcendental terms. Here, it seems, "*the transcendentality of the retrospective question does not lead us to the goal. It leads only to death and birth as transcendental riddles*" (Hua 42, 81)[12]. This is because limit-cases challenge the transcendental principle by challenging the principle of all principles. Indeed, if consciousness is only given first-personally, in order to describe conscious experience we must stick to what is given to us in intuition. How could we, then, make sense of the limits that are, by principle, not given to intuition? Evidently, these are not experiences we can have as such: "*Wanting to experience death as death is an absurdity*" [Tod als Tod erfahren wollen, ist dann win Widersinn] (Hua/Mat 8, 438), but Husserl often wonders whether it suffices to leave them aside as mere events of the constituted world with no transcendental relevance. In a manuscript from 1931 he asks: "*Can objective time-space and world be constituted without all this, are death, etc., accidental factual occurrences of the world? Strange facts!"* [*Kann sich objektive Zeiträumlichkeit und Welt ohne all das konstituieren, sind Tod etc. zufällige faktische Vorkommnisse der Welt? Merkwürdige Fakta*!] (Hua 42, 427). More often than not, Husserl would start his reflections on these topics by presenting the distinction that, as we will see, lies at the bottom of the paradox of subjectivity, namely between empirical and transcendental subject. Death is then an event of the empirical realm but not the transcendental: "*Death is not an occurrence in the "I am" of the transcendental Ego, but an event in the human world*" [Tod ist kein seiendes Vorkommnis im „Ich bin" des transzendentalen Ego, sondern ein Ereignis in der Welt des Menschen] (Hua 42, 78). In the following chapter, I will analyse this division and its paradoxical outcome.

[12] Aber die Transzendentalität der Rückfrage von der seienden Welt führt, scheint es, nicht zum Ziel. Sie führt nur zum Tod und zur Geburt als transzendentale Rätsel