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

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Conclusions to part 3

Where does that leave us regarding death? Insofar as we find ourselves always in between birth and death, we cannot reach beyond these limits. But the reflection on limits, rather than give us a yes or no answer to a metaphysical question, illuminates the fundamental ambiguity of our experience.

Already in chapter 5, we came across the possibility of considering immortality as a purely methodological notion. While mortality could affect the subject as both empirical and constituting, it would be necessary to leave aside a form of subjectivity of a methodological nature to preserve the transcendental principle. However, this strategy ran the risk of dividing subjectivity again when what we are precisely after is the possibility of explaining its unity. Even if we took immortality as a metaphor for something else, explaining that metaphor led to the recognition, in Husserl's thought, of a persistent idealistic standpoint that goes against the phenomenological spirit of going to the things themselves. The methodological need to consider, in the context of a transcendental philosophy, a living point of view as a condition for experience and reflection, should not go against the methodological need of sticking to what can be grounded on intuition. This is why I dismissed the metaphysical question of the immortality of the monad—which cannot receive a yes or no answer through intuition—and recuperated the notion of primal facticity through the work of Tengelyi (2014b), which in an indirect manner, provides us with the only possible answer: we are always already between birth and death, and cannot go beyond that. Considering subjectivity as a unity, we have to admit there is no form of the subject that can go beyond its facticity, not even the phenomenological onlooker considered as a purely methodological notion.

What we have found is that Husserl's account of constitution was perhaps lacking a sufficiently robust foothold in the embodied aspect of the subject. For a subject, to be a body means to have an ambiguous nature that is both constituting and constituted. Husserl may have undermined the importance of the objective aspect of embodiment by considering it the result of the subject's own self-constitution. This meant either that subjectivity was not embodied at all, or that it was embodied only in a subjective manner; yet, as we have seen, it does not seem

possible to isolate a purely subjective body. Even though in many of the texts we have explored throughout this dissertation, he seems to identify this lack and try to compensate it by enlarging the transcendental sphere, this enlargement appears to be half-hearted insofar as he will always retain a notion of transcendental life that remains outside of time and of the world.

The notion of transcendental person, considered as a transcendental subject that is a reality in the spatio-temporal world —and importantly, in a historical and social world— has become our candidate to address the whole of subjectivity. In Husserl's account, and in ours, the person dies. But we cannot consider, as Husserl did, that transcendental life continues. The singularity of our personal lives ends with death, and so does the primordial upsurge of time that Husserl identifies with the primal ego. It ends not because it has never been, but because it can only be in correlation with the world.

And yet, we understand that the transcendental standpoint prevents us from endorsing a position on the matter that pretends to be final. The methodological need to consider, in the context of a transcendental philosophy, a living point of view as a condition for experience and reflection, should not serve to create a split within subjectivity, but as a warning that the results of mundane science should always be put in the context of our subjective constitution; and that the results of subjective constitution should be put in the context of a primal facticity (nature) and the life-world.

Therefore, we have found that when it comes to limits, our very own first-personal experience leads us beyond herself, and in this movement beyond herself we must defend it still. The ambiguity of our own being makes it so that we cannot opt for one perspective or the other completely, since both are already contaminated with the other.

In our view—which has followed Husserl even when opposing him—neither the intuitive evidence nor the first-personal perspective can be forfeited without forfeiting the integrity of the phenomenological enterprise as a whole. Death as a natural phenomenon pushed us to find a balance between these two principles. This balance is only found in a reformulation of the subject as transcendental person.