



# On the Personal, Intersubjective, and Metaphysical Senses of Death: An Inquiry into Edmund Husserl’s Transcendental Phenomenological Approach to Death

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## Abstract

In this short study, I attempt to reconstruct the main conceptual components of Edmund Husserl’s concept of death following the leading clue of his late transcendental phenomenological methodology. First, I summarise his thoughts on death, from the point of view of “the natural attitude”, as an event in the world. Then, I try and explore the manifold senses of the limit phenomenon of death as a multi-dimensional transcendental phenomenological problem in all of its intersubjective-world constitutive, personal-primordial, and metaphysical-constructive layers of meanings, respectively. By doing so, I also hope that the path we travel can serve the reader as an opportunity for a personal and reflective confrontation with death.

**Keywords** Husserl · Death · Phenomenology · Personal · Intersubjective · Metaphysical

*Socrates: “All who actually engage in philosophy aright are practising nothing other than dying and being dead.”<sup>1</sup>*  
*Husserl: “[Death is] the secession of the transcendental ego from its self-objectification as man.”<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> *Phaedo* 64a4-9 (Plato, 1975, p. 8). *Thinking about death as a philosopher*, starting with Socrates, is a matter of distinguished importance for “practising philosophy aright.” For a recent philosophical interpretation of Socrates’ death, see Bradatan (2015). James Dodd connects this locus cited from the *Phaedo* about death directly to Husserl’s philosophy (Dodd, 1997, pp. 118–119).

<sup>2</sup> See Husserl, 2006, p. 97. Unless specified otherwise, all translations from German to English are mine. All italicised texts in quotations are from the original.

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## 1 Introduction

Edmund Husserl, in view of his approaching seventy years of age, became an emeritus in 1928. After his retirement, however, he continued to work tirelessly in the decade until his death to complete his life's work, transcendental phenomenology. If we look back at this last creative period of the founder of phenomenology, we can see that the two main intentions that guided his thought were, in fact, to fulfill the tasks he had to fulfill in view of his expected death. First, he sought to complete his oeuvre and summarise the results of his mature transcendental phenomenology by producing a systematic work during his efforts to rework his *Cartesian Meditations* (Husserl, 1960; 1973c). In his very last years, in a series of writings entitled *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Husserl, 1970; 1993), he attempted to place his oeuvre in the history of philosophy<sup>3</sup> and hand it down to future generations of philosophers. None of his endeavours resulted in completed works, and he always continued to meditate further and deeper rather than summarise his findings. However, we cannot say that he failed after all. His work has continued to live on through the generations of the phenomenological movement, and his ideas are living even today and are thought about in a wide variety of ways.

It was predominantly during this last period that his research manuscripts<sup>4</sup> were written, in which the phenomenological approach to death also became a thematic problem for him.<sup>5</sup> However, Husserl's conception of the philosophical, phenomenological significance of death, in contrast to Heidegger's conception in *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1996, pp. 219–246), is unknown to not only the general public interested in philosophy<sup>6</sup> but also philosophers who are more familiar with phenomenology. Even Husserl scholars have only become aware of the subject in the last

<sup>3</sup> The philosophical–historical explanations of the first parts of the *Crisis-Book* – as I refer to it in the following sections – are also permeated by the indicated intention (see, e.g., “§ 7. The project of the investigations of the present work” [Husserl, 1970, pp. 16–18]). However, this becomes immediately obvious when Husserl begins the systematic development of his own philosophy in the further parts of the work (see Husserl, 1970, pp. 120–121).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Micali, 2008, p. 227. “In den Texten aus den dreißiger Jahren behandelt Husserl ausführlich das Problem des Todes, der Geburt und des Schlafes.” From the point of view highlighted by Micali (2008, pp. 227–229), Husserl's investigations may indeed be considered “exhaustive” (“*ausführlich*”); however, the entire phenomenological methodological approach to the phenomenon of death – especially with regard to the finitude that can be approached in the personal, existential–primordial dimension – may allow for additions.

<sup>5</sup> Husserl's texts on the analysis of death (as well as “birth”, “sleep”, and other limit phenomena); Husserl, 2006: Text Nr. 13b, 13d, 21c, 43, 46, 49a, 49d, 67a, 94, 95, 96, 97; Husserl, 2013: Text Nr. 1. Beilage I–VI; Other places: Husserl, 1966: Beilage VIII; Husserl, 1973c: Beilage VIII, XLIV, XLV, XLVI; Husserl, 2002: Text Nr. 34, 35; Husserl, 2008: Text Nr. 28, 37, 52, Beilage XVIII, XIX.

<sup>6</sup> “Due to Heidegger's vehement critique of all philosophies of consciousness and subjectivity, classical Husserlian phenomenology has long been neglected as an outdated form of Cartesian subjectivism, solipsism, and idealism. Husserl has been accused of disregarding the fundamental structures of facticity and embodiment, as well as the phenomena of death and mortality, when focusing his studies on the constitutive activities of consciousness and conscious subjects” (Heinämaa, 2015, p. 101).

decade and a half or so, mainly in connection with the publication of relevant Husserl manuscripts.<sup>7</sup>

With the present paper I attempt to reconstruct the dimensions of meanings, those manifold senses that can be explored in the phenomenological approach to death by traversing, in a specific way, the entire cross-section of the late Husserlian transcendental phenomenological methodology. In doing so, I follow Husserl closely. At some points, however, I shall also try to draw attention to aspects that, as far as I have been able to ascertain, he did not touch upon in his investigations.<sup>8</sup>

I hope also to raise awareness about the potential of the Husserlian transcendental phenomenological approach to death as an eminent researcher of the subject puts it: “In the long run, the Husserlian standpoint could prove advantageous” because it is – in contrast to the Heideggerian and Levinasian standpoint – “built upon both personal and interpersonal experiences” (Geniusas, 2010, p. 80).<sup>9</sup>

Husserl considered the question of death as a limit problem for the phenomenological approach, along with other limit phenomena such as “birth”, “sleep”, “dreamless sleep”, “the unconscious”, “fainting”, “early childhood development”, “animal animality”, and “the other self”, among others (see, e.g., Husserl, 2006, pp. 154–166; 2013, pp. 1–81).<sup>10</sup> These are limit problems insofar as they cross the boundaries of phenomenological description: they necessarily lack the evidence for their solution and are outside the scope of the immediate, perceptible phenomena at any given time. Rather, they are given to us indirectly through the transitional phenomena of experience: through the boundaries, the edges, the disappearance, and the breaks in continuity of our direct experience of our present conscious life. Their approach, Husserl is convinced, is, therefore, only possible after a phenomenological foundation: after grasping and building on the features of our actual, present conscious life (see e.g., in the *Crisis-Book* here Husserl, 1970, p. 169). The “liminal” nature of these problems does not imply that they are of marginal importance. They are only methodologically limit problems: issues (as limit problems) that, although arising within

<sup>7</sup> The following are more important studies from the literature that also deal with Husserl’s concept of death, which I refer to: Dodd (2010); Geniusas (2010); Heinämaa (2015); Mensch (2010); Micali (2008); and Steinbock (2017). The most important and relevant Husserl manuscripts can be found in Husserl texts (2006; 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Primarily, I try and refer to aspects in the interpretation of the finitude of our personality in Husserl’s works – perhaps less developed in his texts. (See, e.g., Geniusas, 2010, p. 79: “The problematic of finitude is not as developed in Husserl as it is in Heidegger or Levinas.”) In this study, I have also tried to briefly explore all three (existential–primordial, world constitutive–intersubjective, and metaphysical–constructive) transcendental methodological layers of Husserl’s analyses.

<sup>9</sup> Heinämaa (2015) agrees with Saulius Geniusas and adds that “Husserlian sources also allow us to find a fruitful new approach to the idea of death as an evil or harm widely discussed in analytical philosophy. They help distinguish between different types of harm, and by implication allow us to keep separate different forms of caution and prudence” (p. 101).

<sup>10</sup> Broadly interpreted, all such phenomena can be classified as limit phenomena that fall outside the present horizon of the conscious mind, which, therefore, in principle, exceeds the horizon of direct perceptual self-givenness. These phenomena are “accessible only in the way of original inaccessibility”, using Husserl’s formula for the experience of an alter ego (e.g., Husserl, 1960, p. 114) in an extended way. Thus, in addition to other subjectivities and the phenomena mentioned above (e.g., unconscious content, vague fantasies, and animal and plant life, among others), they are limit phenomena too.

the phenomenological constitution, indicate the methodological limits of a static or genetic phenomenological approach.<sup>11</sup>

In the sections that follow, I will attempt to reconstruct the main conceptual components of the Husserlian approach to the limit phenomenon of death. In doing so, death as a limit problem is always given differently and seen differently from the phenomenological perspectives that emerge in the course of transcendental phenomenological reduction and world constitution. In our exploration, we follow Husserl's guidance, but I do not always draw attention to what he directs his own.

## 2 Perspective of The Natural Attitude and Death as An Event in The World

Husserl's initial insight concerning death is that, in the natural attitude, our ideas about our own future death (as well as our former birth) are of an intersubjective origin: they derive from the experience of the death of others and from narratives told by others (see, e.g., Husserl, 1993, p. 332; 2006, p. 168; 2013, pp. 2–3). Thus, death can be approached phenomenologically from the perspective of the experience of the other or rather of the intersubjective constitution of the world.

Since others are given to us directly bodily, we must, first of all, take an account of the problem of the body.<sup>12</sup> In the experience of the natural attitude, bodies are worldly entities. In this respect, Husserl articulates the problem through the conceptual distinction of the “physical body – animate body” (*Körper–Leib*). To elaborate, some bodies are purely material things (*Körper*), while others are expressions of subjectivity and animate bodies of their own (*Leib*). Purely material bodies can be approached through naturalistic observation. We can provide explanations and make predictions about them. However, we can relate to animate bodies as we relate to our own bodies: personally. We can take it as an expression of a living being or as a means to an end of subjectivity. We can react to it and respond to it.

From the point of view of the phenomenological constitution of experience, however, we can make a different distinction from the previous one: between the “lived body” and the “objectified body.” In the first case, we experience our body as a feeling, perceiving, or acting body – in the first person singular. In the second case, we experience it as a perceived body – in the third person singular (e.g., when I hold one hand of mine in the other and whenever we see ourselves in forms objectified by others or by ourselves).

In distinguishing between the two kinds of relations to the body, we can say that when we imagine our own death in terms of our experience of the death of others,<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> For the methodological problems of the limit phenomena, see Micali (2008, pp. 233–234) and Sowa (2013, pp. XXXVI–XLIV). The distinction between limit phenomena and transitional phenomena has a crucial role in Husserl's methodological approach (see e.g., Husserl, 2006, pp. 154–159; 2013, pp. 8–14). Here, I would like to thank the reviewer of an earlier version of the manuscript for emphasising the importance of this distinction, as well as for other valuable comments.

<sup>12</sup> I will follow Heinämaa's (2015, pp. 102–104) explanation here for the following two types of conceptual distinctions related to the body.

<sup>13</sup> See e.g., a shaping of the problem here in Husserl (2006, p. 438).

we overlap the two perspectives: our own perspective, which is directly experienced, overlapped with the perspective of others, which is only indirectly given and directly inaccessible to us. Meanwhile, we – *sub silentio* – hypothetically place the death of ourselves as a future event in the objective time.

Whether we look at the event of our death in a naturalistic or personalistic way, the same spontaneous overlapping or covering and transposition can be seen. In the former case, we think of our own death as the end of an organism's life understood as a natural process. This is like the death of animals and the withering of plants. In a personalistic way, we think of our death not merely as the death of an organism but as the end of the existence of a subject that opens to the world from its own perspective – that carries and expresses a unique meaning. Death, in turn, will be dated as a chronological event among the events in the world as the end of the life history of a given person.

Although there is always the danger of a spontaneous conflation of our own perspective and that of others, Husserl does not want to bring discredit to the natural attitude. His intention is, indeed, to provide the claims of the natural attitude with a transcendental phenomenological clarification and elucidation.

### 3 Death as A Multidimensional Transcendental Phenomenological Problem

When, in the natural attitude, we take death as a worldly event and approach it from the point of view of the death of others, we leave undifferentiated the problem of how we gain experience and knowledge of death from the question of what the meaning and significance of death are for us. In our philosophical stance, as we reflect upon our own approach, we have a better chance – intellectually – to clarify this ambiguity.

By changing our attitude – i.e., by practising a transcendental phenomenological epoché – we suspend the spontaneous tendency of our natural attitude to that ambiguity and transposition mentioned above.<sup>14</sup> We are, therefore, careful not to overlap our own experiential perspective with the perspective of others in general. At the same time, our attention is no longer focused on the actual occurrence of death but on the phenomenon of death – i.e., on the way death emerges and unfolds its manifold senses to us.

The approach to transcendental subjectivity in the late Husserl works, which methodologically extended the phenomenological method to the problems of intersubjectivity,<sup>15</sup> can be followed in three steps. With each of these steps, we are,

<sup>14</sup> Experiencing the trauma of the death of people close to us – of *close others* – as well as facing the possibility of our own death can actually play a role in everyday life similar to that of the epoché: both can counteract the objectification of death and direct our attention towards the significance of death – and life – for us. As is well known, anxiety and death have a crucial methodological significance in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, fulfilling the function of a phenomenological epoché and reduction.

<sup>15</sup> According to the evidence of the three large Husserliana volumes (Husserl, 1973a, b, c) containing his texts related to intersubjectivity, Husserl was concerned with the problem of an appropriate phenomenological approach to intersubjectivity from the beginning of the 1910s. In the first half of the 1920s, he also gained important insights into the constitutional importance of intersubjectivity. Yet, only the develop-

in fact, uncovering deeper and deeper layers of meaning formation within ourselves and our own subjectivity.

Step one reveals our self as the *self of a community* (intersubjectivity). First, we come to the immediate subjective origin of the objective sense of reality of the natural attitude – the prior givenness of the world and of the things in the world. This is the intersubjective – ontological or, at a higher level, generative or historical – path of phenomenological reduction, which leads to subjectivity as a self of a community. The community of the selves exists in a process of the communicative normalisational constitution of reality. From the perception of the world of each person, it is “communication” in the broadest sense between people – an iterable reflexive mediation, i.e., communication – which highlights, optimises, and condenses certain traits into types through repeated confirmations as a permanent, habitualised trait. Then, this normalised trait emerges as a pre-given “thing” within the world for actual perceptions. Meanwhile, it pushes other features into the background. These features become “purely subjective” perceptions of the normalised figure, which has now become objective – i.e., given in advance in the world and valid for everyone.<sup>16</sup> Death now, from this perspective of the intersubjective, communicative constitution of the world, can be understood as a separation from the community and a cessation or withdrawal from which there is no return. The theme of death, thus, takes on a wide scope of meaning. Death in the sense of leaving the common, shared world includes, for instance, the loss of sight, hearing, speech, and writing as a result of head and brain injuries. Alternatively, someone retires and, after a while, becomes unable to keep up with developments in their professional world, or older generations do not use mobile phones or the internet (and are, therefore, not on social media platforms). The examples are endless, of course.

What in the natural attitude appears as the death of others and as an experience of their disappearance from the world, now, from an internal, transcendental view, takes on the sense of withdrawal from the world of communicating subjects. We lose our world by being cut off from our communicative communities: “Death for the transcendental self can mean this: it loses its ‘corporeality’, its world-consciousness, it leaves regulation.” (Husserl, 2006, p. 102).<sup>17</sup>

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ments emerging from the reflections of the *Fifth Cartesian Meditation* opened up for him the methodologically and systematically promising way of exploring and establishing “transcendental subjectivity as transcendental intersubjectivity” – including its higher constitutional layers: society, culture, and history. (See, e.g., Kern, 1973, p. XXXIII: “die Etablierung der transzendentalen Subjektivität als transzendentaler Intersubjektivität.”)

<sup>16</sup> For the problem of the communicative constitution of the world (as a process of normalisation!), see, e.g., § 47 of the *Crisis-Book* (Husserl, 1970, pp. 161–164) or Eugen Fink’s *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* (1995, p. 6).

<sup>17</sup> Regarding the higher level of the intersubjectivity problem – the generative or historical dimension that exceeds the sphere of the actual communication community – Husserl highlights the possibility of a *tradition* formation. It refers to the fact that a life with a specific meaning and style realised in our own personality involves, through intersubjectivity, the possibility of repeating – in our own way – a meaning and way of life inherited from previous generations. Furthermore, as a consequence, it involves the possibility of passing further on our own way of life – more precisely, the possibility of being taken over by others and continued in this way! For the same problem in the context of the adoption and transmission of the idea of the task of philosophy, see Husserl’s text (1993, pp. 373–375, 421–423). Husserl’s well-known ideas about the establishment (*Urstiftung*) and sedimentation (*Sedimentierung*) of meaning also belong to

A second step leads to our self as a *person*. In the next step of the phenomenological reduction – which Husserl calls “primordial reduction”<sup>18</sup> – we dispense with the consideration of the features of intersubjective constitution. We, thus, suspend – only in thought, of course – the process of communicative normalisation and, at the same time, differentiate our transcendental field of experience, dividing it into two parts. We separate all the contents originating from our own subjectivity from the contents produced through our communication with others that can only be related to the intentional activity of other subjectivities. We abstract from how the experience of things and we ourselves are given to other subjectivities. We abstract from appropriating the perspectives of others. We restrict ourselves to our primordial sphere – i.e., to how the things, other subjectivities, and even ourselves are given to us. In this way, a deeper constitutive dimension of transcendental subjectivity is revealed to us beneath the layer of intersubjective communicative normalisation. This is the primordial sphere with its primordial world, with the world of our own experiences being considered within the primordial reduction. This primordial world is our world deprived of its intersubjective dimensions. More properly, it is a world that is *not yet* an intersubjectively constituted – objective spatio-temporal, socio-cultural, and historical – world.

Within this sphere of our own experiences, we are then confronted not with other selves but with the temporal multiplicity of our own selves – or, more precisely, with our whole life unfolding in time. We have arrived at the dimension of transcendental – active and passive – genesis (the actual core sphere of genetic phenomenology). Husserl refers to the self in two different senses in this dimension (see Husserl, 2002, p. 471).<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, he conceives of it as the self-pole (or ego-pole) of the sphere of the act of the present, and on the other hand, he takes it as the self of the faculties – in the broadest sense – habitualised and bound to the self in its temporal genesis – i.e., as a *person*.<sup>20</sup>

In a more deeply personal sense, the problem of death arises for us when we no longer see – beyond the understanding that it is not seen as the end of one’s existence in the world – its meaning and significance only in the separation from the world-constituting community with others. The meaning of death, then, which is beyond the loss of the world, reveals itself as the mortality – as finitude in different senses – of our personality.

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this circle of thoughts (see, e.g., Husserl, 1993, pp. 376–423). Later on in this study, we will return to this question in the context of the metaphysical problems of Husserl’s approach to death, touching on the issues of “transmigration” and “development” of the soul respectively.

<sup>18</sup> For primordial reduction and/or abstraction, see, e.g., Husserl’s texts (1950, pp. 124–130; 1973c, pp. 50–52; 2006, p. 153, pp. 424–425).

<sup>19</sup> For the notion of an “I” as a transcendental person, see, e.g., Husserl (2002, pp. 451–453).

<sup>20</sup> The “person” understood in its full concreteness – i.e., as a correlation of habitualised faculties, together with their intentional objects that are also habitualised and thus ultimately with the whole surrounding world – is referred to by Husserl with the Leibnizian term “monad.” The community of the selves understood in this way is called the “monadic community.” Further, the world of natural reality–consciousness that emerges through the communicative normalisation taking place in the monadic community, in which all things appear to us (it is important for us to always keep this insight in mind) is not, in fact, the immediate environment but the comprehensive horizon encompassing our monadic surrounding world at any given time!

By refocusing our attention on the transcendental primordial sphere, we create an inner distance from the spatio-temporal, socio-cultural, historical, communicative–intersubjective higher layer of our selves (for the primordial reduction and/or abstraction, see, e.g., Husserl, 1950, pp. 124–130; 1973c, pp. 50–52; 2006, p. 153, pp. 424–425). Deprived – only in thought, of course – of our three-dimensional objective worldly existence, we are left with the peculiarly two-dimensional existential–primordial deep layer of our subjectivity: we as subjectivities (self-poles) operating in the present and we – as the purely subjective side of our life histories – as persons emerging from the habitualisation of our experiences in the past.

We as persons are, first and foremost and directly, the selves of our personality traits (abilities, interests, and so on) that manifest at any given moment. These acquired characteristics, however, are not necessarily always part of our present actual functioning. But they are actualisable, re-presentable traits. For instance, we hear a car on the street. The perception is fading towards zero intensity. But we can recall it and “hear it again” in our memory, and of course, we retain our openness and capacity to hear the noise of another car – although we may not even be aware of a louder car noise than the one to which we are currently listening. Indeed, it goes without saying that after our present state of awareness, we will fall asleep in the evening and rise again tomorrow, only to be able to detect the noise of the car without any further ado.

Let us turn away from the specific content and highlight the general structural features of the problem in the primordial sphere. Then, the central problem of personality formation becomes the ability to reactualise, to represent (*Vergegenwärtigung*), which, like remembering, presupposes the sedimentation of the present experience and the ability of the self as the ego-pole of the present to actualise this self-function again.

The Husserlian picture of sedimentation is the settling of the impressions of the actual waking consciousness in a series of retentive phases towards zero intensity. Only these interruptions of waking consciousness, however, allow recall and, through it, habitualisation and individuation. A person who would keep all their faculties perpetually awake and in actual operation (Husserl, 2006, pp. 422–423) would certainly live a very special and intense life; however, they would certainly not be a human being at all. We are, thus, confronted with human finitude in Husserl’s problem of sedimentation–representation. It is a matter of an essential finitude that is at the core of our own subjectivity and not a problem of consciousness that results from the external experience of the death of others.

I highlight three features in seeking the meaning and significance of death at this level in Husserl. First (polarising the problem towards the ego-pole of transcendental subjectivity), I draw attention to a *specific, internal threat*. For, from the point of view of our present functioning, our waking consciousness, there is an essential asymmetry between the spontaneity of our self as the self-pole of our present functioning and the relative passivity, the inertia of our personality, which is formed by habitualisation but can only be reactualised by the ego-pole from its sedimentation. Somehow, it is always a question: whether we can no longer perceive and feel what we have just perceived and felt and whether and how we will perceive and feel again – or when we wake up or come to after fainting, whether we are as capable of all that



we were before. The significance of death can be grasped in the constant threat<sup>21</sup> of not waking up from our sedimented, disinterested, and exhausted state. We, as persons, become permanently unconscious, exhausted, and finally “asleep.”<sup>22</sup>

As a second feature of our own finite person (considering transcendental subjectivity within its primordial sphere), we can understand death as *a permanent possibility of disintegration of our own personality*: as a person with such and such habituality, manifesting in such and such a style, I cease to exist. The processes of habitualisation of the sedimentation of actual experiences and the reactualisation of sedimented traits are subjected to disintegration at all levels. Habitualisation, as a process of normalisation,<sup>23</sup> which shapes personality, is inherently open to anomalies. The concordance of the actual (re-)perception and re-recognition of something is constantly threatened by discordance. Further, the optimisation of experience – to better grasp the thing in question – can always be derailed by misinterpretations. The standardisation may prove itself impossible by the proliferation of the atypical. Finally, the attachment of something firmly as a feature to our self is endangered by the possibilities of alienation. Our personality can fall apart in many ways. Those familiar with neurotic disorders and psychotic disorders would have much to say about this. Who was Hölderlin or Nietzsche in the decades of their madness? Now, at this point in the course of thought, we can say that the disturbances of habitualisation processes confront us with the meaning of our death as always an actual possibility of a disintegration of our personality.

Finally, as a third feature (polarising the problem here towards the intersubjective layer of transcendental subjectivity), death confronts us with our own finitude in a different way. In the constant continuation of our own personality in the process of habitualisation of our life history, we repeat and identify with ourselves as other – former – selves, actualising ourselves. We are the ones who repeat other selves: in the complex processes of habitualisation indicated above, we experience and validate as our own here and now a feeling, a perception, a behaviour, or an aspiration that we take on from another self – our own former self. Placing ourselves in the relations of intersubjective, communicative normalisation involves the possibility of handing over and taking over meanings, feelings, intentions, and so on: it opens up the possibility of a “tradition.” Our own personality – the style, form, or sense that prevails

<sup>21</sup> Heinämaa interprets the threat of death in Husserl in another way, in the dimension of the transcendental ego: “If every experiential moment by necessity includes an opening onto a future moment, then it is not possible to experience any ‘last moment’ of life, a moment that would halt the succession and close the futural opening. This implies that each human death – however natural as an organic process and however expected as a historical event – bears the significance of a violent interruption. Further, this implies that the most proximate sense of death is that of a threat: “Only a human being is a person and is not just a subject of action but also sees herself as a subject of an open horizon of life and action, [only a human being] is permanently threatened by death as a rupture of this waking life and action and as an end which, in its indefiniteness, is merely an incessantly continuing, never-ending threat” (Husserl, 1989, p. 98)” (Heinämaa, 2015, p. 109). We will address below the problem of the impossibility of experiencing a last moment of life in the context of a certain kind of immortality of the transcendental ego.

<sup>22</sup> Husserl (2008) uses the phrase “the last ‘sleep’” (*der letzte “Schlaf”*) (p. 500) at this point, interpreting death in the primordial sphere. (See also Husserl, 2006, p. 97.)

<sup>23</sup> For Husserl’s concept of habitualisation via the stages of “concordance–optimisation–typification–attachment to the self”, see Steinbock (1995, pp. 125–170).

in it – can be a repetition (albeit necessarily a modified one) of a style, form, or sense that is manifested in another personality.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, it is also the possibility of our personality being continued in repetition by another. Let us now consider, however, that we are confronted with a potentially infinite horizon of repeatable personality traits of open possibilities. The problem arises to a certain extent already within the sphere of our own personal life history. However, it manifests itself in its overall significance on the horizon of others. Here, we are confronted with our finitude as the limitation of the personality traits that we can repeat and realise. Taking over something – even as much as possible – from ourselves or others, we are still left with unrealised – though eventually otherwise realisable – possibilities – not to mention those possibilities that do not even arise as possibilities. We may say that death confronts us with both *the finitude of human nature realised or realisable in ourselves* and the potential infinity of human nature realisable in the community of mankind.<sup>25</sup>

The third and final methodological step reveals our self as the *living present of the ego-pole* of transcendental subjectivity. It is through the distinction between the “self-pole” and the “person” that we can see the possibility of moving on to the deepest layer of transcendental subjectivity. In this final step of phenomenological reduction, we suspend the consideration of the habitualisation process associated with our temporal openness, and at the same time, we disregard the contents of the self as a person acquired through life history – including our whole subjective surrounding world. This is when the deepest layer of transcendental subjectivity is revealed to us. It is the self-pole of our subjectivity as the self in the acts of the present at any given moment – i.e., our self not only of the acquired but also of the elementary faculties – that always exist and are always actually present and operating. The path of our transcendental phenomenological reductive, regressive back-questioning leads us back to the very core of our own subjectivity – to our most elementary manifestations, as we have always been and are. These manifestations are always present in all of our life’s experiences and, therefore, cannot be exclusively linked and fixed to any specific time, experience, or process. At the same time, this most elementary part of our subjectivity, of our self, is not static (it is Husserl’s ultimate insight) but is characterised by a specific vividness, movement, and dynamism and a constant coming-into-being. This is a coming-into-being, however, in which we ourselves are constantly coming into being as self, as consciousness. Thinking, or reflective retrospection, arrives here at a particular self-referential endpoint or, rather, at its own very origin,<sup>26</sup> transcend-

<sup>24</sup> Husserl refers to tradition – not to mere repetition – which also includes modification (see, e.g., Husserl, 2006, pp. 436–437).

<sup>25</sup> At this point, regarding the finitude of our personality, I draw attention to something different from Husserl. Husserl (2006), at a point in one of his research manuscripts from 1931 “How is a continual world constituted beyond the pauses of sleep?” draws attention to the significance of death (as well as “sleep” and “birth”) for the constitution of an objective world as an intuitively, perceptually inaccessible, non-actualisable possibility (pp. 417–430). He includes his concept of “meaning-more” (*Mehrmeinung*) in the explanation too. Well, I interpret the Husserlian insights concerning death in the context of human finitude here – not in connection with the constitution of the objective world.

<sup>26</sup> Mensch (2010) renders the performative contradiction-avoiding connection in Husserl between the insights of the transcendental, phenomenological reduction and the evidence of the beginning revealed in the living present of the transcendental ego as follows: “It is, in fact, possible to see the whole of his argumentation regarding time consciousness as motivated by the goal of providing an account of our selfhood

ing the boundaries of itself as reflection. The fixation of the insights gained here into conscious thoughts (not to mention its communication in concepts or in speech) is burdened with such an inherent posteriority in which we are always and already outside the original sphere of this pre-reflective self-awareness of the coming-into-being of our consciousness.

Husserl seeks to reveal the particular liveliness of our self, the source of our subjectivity, in terms of the concepts of time. In his later years, he deepens his discovery of the impression–retention–protention (*Urimpression–Retention–Protention*) structure of the core of inner time consciousness, which he had maintained from his early lectures on time, by calling it a “living present” (*lebendige Gegenwart*).

Husserl (1970) grasps the particular liveliness and dynamism of our waking life as a “flowing static” (p. 168) living present state in which the conscious forms or objects as meaning constructions unconsciously, passively, and temporally emerge completely “hidden.” He tries to refer to the temporal moments and phases of this hidden arising “now” with the triple structure indicated above. The elementary impressions (*Urimpression*), which reach us through our original openness and cross the threshold of consciousness, are preserved for us by a series of phases of direct, immediate retentions (*Retention*), of direct, immediate “remembering.” Simultaneously, concrete, direct, and immediate expectations (*Protention*) are directed towards impressions by which we may be touched – which are then retained for us by a series of retentional phases that are interwoven with the previous ones and getting condensed. It is from this dynamic of a stationary three-phase structure as the form of the absolute flow of time consciousness, which is constantly taking place covertly, that the objective moments emerge – i.e., an “original formation of meaning” (see, e.g., § 49 of the *Crisis-Book*, Husserl, 1970, pp. 167–170) – of which we are aware.

The new concept of the present in the late Husserl emphasises the relation of the inner time consciousness to the self: in the temporal “now” as the most elementary object formation that occurs in the impression–retention–protentional event, we ourselves are created as self for ourselves in time: our own self-objectification (*Zeitigung*) is constantly taking place. This is how, in Husserl’s view, our self, as the agent of all our activity, the self-pole, is constantly and completely passively generated.

The insights that can be gained from the self of the self-pole are the grasping of pure self-like traits that then necessarily prevail everywhere in the higher layers of transcendental subjectivity – in the monadic self of the inner flow of experience and in the self of the monadic community – and in our natural way of thinking as human beings living in the world. These most elementary subjective traits are strictly *a priori* in character and cannot be located exclusively in any delimited time or space.

Let us take the third step in the exploration of transcendental subjectivity and suspend the aspect of individuation as a person. To elaborate, let us abstract from the whole dimension of sedimentation and representation. We then focus purely on

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that justifies itself by including its own possibility. The selfhood, whose temporal constitution Husserl describes, is the same selfhood that is capable of putting forth the arguments that he makes for it. This is because the concepts of thesis and evidence required for such arguments are inherent in the constitutive process that results in this selfhood” (pp. 265–266).

the flowing–steady living present of the self-pole (the transcendental ego) with its impressional–retentional–protentional structure.

“The transcendental ego cannot die and cannot be born,” Husserl says several times (see it in different contexts in, e.g., Husserl, 1966, pp. 379–381; 1973bb, pp. 156–157; 1973c, p. 609, 610; 1993, pp. 332–333; 2002, p. 471; 2013, p. 151). Reading this statement, it would be a misunderstanding to think of an immortal soul, some eternal corporeal being, or even a non-temporal or supertemporal entity. Such ideas presuppose conceptions of time that are inadequate for the temporality of the transcendental ego. For the innermost core of transcendental subjectivity, neither the meanings of death in relation to existence in the intersubjective spatio-temporal world nor the meanings of death in relation to internal temporal sedimentation can be valid.

In fact, Husserl, when he writes about the “unimaginability” or “unthinkability” of the death of the transcendental self (see, e.g., Husserl, 2006, pp. 96–97)<sup>27</sup>, draws attention to the fact that by thinking or imagining death, we presuppose the disappearance of the future horizon, whereas in the living present of the self-pole itself, which is functioning even in this thought or imagination, too, future horizons are constantly opening up, as in all thinking and imagination. All ongoing experience presupposes the preceding and following inner temporal experiences: it presupposes the constant flow of inner time itself, the impressional–retentional–protentional structure. Consequently, it is not possible, without performative self-contradiction, to have a future moment to imagine that could be a kind of “last moment” of life. As conscious subjects, we cannot get beyond our own ends. Within thinking (and by this, we refer to all consciousness functions), the *experience* of the cessation – the “death” – of thinking is unthinkable. The impressional–retentional–protentional living present structure is a flow-resistant structure. It is an open infinity without fixed boundaries.

Let us move on to the important consequence of this particular insight into “*phenomenological immortality*.”<sup>28</sup> Let us “turn back” to the higher constitutive layers of subjectivity. Now, we can say that only in the layers of subjectivity outside this innermost subjective core – and presupposing this core itself – is it possible to conceive of the factors that give meaning to death – disappearances, boundaries, breaks, cessations, disintegrations, finite possibilities, and so on. It is precisely this insight that sheds light on the paradoxical significance of the immortality of the transcendental ego: for us, as persons, as selves in a community, and as human beings existing in a

<sup>27</sup> In the same place, Husserl also speaks of a certain imaginability (“in gewisser Weise vorstellbar”) of the cessation (*Aufhören*) of opening protentional future horizons (p. 97) – i.e., of the cessation of the temporal flow. He refers to unconscious states, to a dreamless sleep (“Schlaf [der tiefe, aktlose, abhebungslose]”), and to some kind of an irreversible sleep or coma as death (“der Tod in dem besonderen inneren Sinn [wenn das Tod heißen darf], der nichts anderes wäre als ein Schlaf, aus dem kein Erwachen herausführt”).

<sup>28</sup> Steinbock (2017) uses the phrase “phenomenological immortality” (p. 21) in his generative phenomenological analysis of Husserl’s thoughts on birth and death (pp. 21–35). Husserl, of course, emphasises that it is always important to keep in mind that the phenomenological problem of the immortality of the transcendental ego should not be confused with the misleading assumption of the “immortality” of man (Husserl, 1993, p. 338).

world, it is only by presupposing this particular immortality that it becomes possible to approach our mortality.

#### **4 Natural attitude as a transcendental–phenomenologically constituted perspective and death as a condition for the experience of objective time, and as a metaphysical problem**

Let us now return to our natural attitude, but in such a way that we retain a certain degree of explicit inner reflexivity. Therefore, let us dissolve our reflective attitude, which was established in the phenomenological epoché in which we have suspended our naive absorption in the world. On the one hand, however, let us preserve the complex insights we have acquired in the reductive back-questioning and meaning constitution that we have carried out in the epoché. On the other hand, we must crucially remain ready and steady in the course of our natural life to deal with what is given to us by repeatedly entering the reflexivity of the epoché. The habitualisation of the phenomenological epoché<sup>29</sup> – the suspension of our beliefs on existence or non-existence – can, thus, always keep alive our insight that the basic conviction of the natural attitude towards the objective existence of the things and the world happens to be formed by intersubjective, communicative normalisation. Consequently, this insight must include our awareness of our own existence as human beings in the world too. In other words, from the perspective of phenomenological reflection, we are, as human beings who exist in the world, the “self-objectification” (Husserl, 1970, p. 186) or the self-realisation of our transcendental subjectivity.

By understanding our natural attitude as a transcendental–phenomenologically constituted perspective, we have the opportunity, on the one hand, to clarify the fundamental ambiguity that characterises the conception of death in the natural attitude and to assess the significance of the intersubjective source of our understanding of death. This very same position opens up the possibility for us, on the other hand, to reveal the metaphysical dimension of Husserl’s thoughts on death.

We have seen that when we conceive of death in the natural attitude as a worldly event,<sup>30</sup> we overlap our own directly experiencing perspective with the only indirectly given perspective of others. Viewed from within the epoché – i.e., from a transcendental perspective – this overlapping can be understood as a nondifferentiation of the intersubjective and personal or monadic (and self-pole) dimensions of our own subjectivity. Moreover, we may dissolve ourselves in the intersubjective constitution. Further, as a result, we may place ourselves as human beings existing in the world purely within the perspective of the intersubjective constitution, and in fact, we already see ourselves from the perspective of the “others” in general. Thus, the understanding of the death of others is, as it were, unreflectively identified with the understanding of our “own” death. Death is seen in the world as an event in which the experience of the body changes. The body, even if it still appears to be a living body,

<sup>29</sup> See it in our present context in, e.g., Husserl’s text (1962, pp. 294–295).

<sup>30</sup> For the approach to death from our current point of view, see, e.g., Husserl’s text (1993, pp. 323–338): “Weltleben und Sterben der menschlichen und transzendentalen Subjektivität.”

loses “the conditions of possibility of empathy” and is no longer “an expression of a soul” (Husserl, 1993, p. 332).

In addition, at this point, I want to emphasise that the phenomenological analysis of death reveals a new meaning that closes the circle of our reflections. We are back to our starting point: the objective spatio-temporal experience of death in the natural attitude. However, now, we have the possibility of understanding it from its transcendental–phenomenological origins. Therefore, let us now approach the experience of death in the natural attitude from within the epoché: seeing ourselves and our experience of the world as a constitutive performance of transcendental subjectivity. Only now can we adequately understand Husserl’s formulaic definition: “Death is the secession of the transcendental ego from its self-objectification as man.” (*Ibid.*)<sup>31</sup>

*Excursus* In order to approach the difference between Husserl’s and Heidegger’s understanding of death, I refer to two researchers.

1. *James Dodd* points to the difference that the ecstatic character of time plays in Heidegger’s and Husserl’s interpretations of death. According to his view, Husserl tries to minimise the constitutive role of death for the ecstatic nature of time. However, in Heidegger’s eyes, one might say, this misses the point. For Heidegger, as we know, the anticipation of death or running forward into it opens up the ecstatic character of time and enables the fateful occurrence of existence and, thus, an authentic existence. Dodd’s other insight is connected to this crucial role of authenticity: the emphasis on the importance of death in Heidegger does not originate from a strictly phenomenological analysis of time but from outside it – from the problem of authenticity (see Dodd, 2010, p. 68). I would add two more features to Dodd’s comments: First, as a result of the fact that for Heidegger, authentic or specific existence (*Eigentlichkeit*) is the leading aspect (as a result, Heidegger’s conception is characterised by the event character of the choice of fate and the problem of the possible wholeness or integrity of *Dasein*), his approach can be interpreted from the point of view of the “middle” layer of Husserl’s methodological analysis: at the level of a transcendental *person*, between transcendental ego and transcendental intersubjectivity. We can add, secondly, that the importance of death in relation to authenticity in Heidegger takes on an intersubjective character *to a certain, limited extent*: i.e., within the scope of our current generation. His concept of a “historical fate” articulates it (see “74. The Essential Constitution of Historicity”, Heidegger, 1996, pp. 350–354). As Heidegger (1996) claims, “the fateful destiny of Da-sein in and with its ‘generation’ constitutes the complete, authentic occurrence of Da-sein” (p. 352.)
2. *Saulius Geniūsas* draws attention to the difference between the strategies followed by Husserl and Heidegger in their phenomenological approach to death from the point of view of finitude. He sees that, despite the fact that Husserl’s

<sup>31</sup> Husserl contrasts here the quoted, formulaic definition of death with Heidegger’s understanding. He makes only the following comment: “Death itself might hardly be reconciled with the dazzling, profound ways in which Heidegger deals with it” (“Die blendenden, tief sinnigen Weisen, in denen Heidegger mit dem Tode umspringt, wird sich der Tod schwerlich gefallen lassen.”).

problem of finitude is not as elaborated as Heidegger's, Husserl's approach is still more favourable in some respects. Heidegger's (and Levinas's) approach fits into the strategy that makes a sharp distinction between personal and intersubjective experiences regarding our finitude. Then, on this basis, Heidegger gives preference to one of the sources (to the personal one) and bases his deemed adequate understanding of death on it. At the same time, he considers the other experience (the intersubjective one) – which is devalued – as an inadequate source of knowledge. According to Geniusas, however, it is highly doubtful that the approach to the phenomenon of death itself calls for such a strategy. From the perspective of Husserl's analyses, Heidegger's strategy to approach the death phenomenon "rather restricts its manifestation" (Geniusas, 2010, p. 79). In his view, Husserl's approach does not require us to choose between the two sources of our finitude – personal and intersubjective – but rather it is an approach that "incorporates both resources" (Geniusas, 2010, p. 80.), and therefore, "in the long run, the Husserlian standpoint could prove advantageous." In addition, Geniusas reveals the fundamental difference between Husserl's and Heidegger's strategies in the context of the relation of death and time: "While Heidegger invites us to think time on the basis of death, Husserl invites us to think death on the basis of time. For this reason, while for Heidegger authentic temporality amounts to the possibility of impossibility, conceived as pure destruction, for Husserl authentic temporality is the ultimate condition of all phenomenality, including that of destruction. As an ultimate origin of phenomenality, temporality also circumscribes limits: in sharp contrast to Heidegger, it renders the phenomenon of pure destruction impossible" (Geniusas, 2010, p. 86).

We have already taken into account the different meanings of death as a withdrawal from the self-objectification of world constitution in relation to the three layers of transcendental subjectivity. Now, however, returning to the perspective of the natural attitude from the transcendental constitution, we have the opportunity to explore another layer of the meaning of death. It is the objectivity–consciousness of the natural attitude that can be highlighted from the transcendental perspective of the experience of the death of others.

We can now understand that in all this, the intersubjective source of our experience of death plays an essential role (see Husserl, 2006, p. 427). Without it, we would not be able to understand "how time can extend beyond the limits of my own primordial experience" (Geniusas, 2010, p. 83). Our own primordial experience can confront us with the dissolution of our personalities in several ways. However, in our own subjectivity, at the very core of our life, and in the living present of our transcendental ego, which is the condition of all our possible experiences, the experience of our own death and of a time that extends beyond us is unthinkable. Only the *necessary* – and not accidental – occurrence of death (as well as birth and sleep) in the world (Husserl, 1973c, pp. 171–172; 2006, pp. 417–430, p. 418, 424) allows the experiences of others to be radically separable from our own. Further, only this radical separation constitutes the possibility of an experience of a time – and a world – by others that goes beyond the scope of our own experiences – which was going on before we were born, which is going on when we sleep, and which will continue after we die. A time and a

world that are independent of us are objective to us; we are allowed to be aware of the experience of such a time and a world only through our communication with others.

Part of our perception of reality in our communicative community is that our lifeworld happens to be only one (see Husserl, 2006, p. 427) amid other lifeworlds; our world concept is only one of the world concepts that constitute our own current cultural world. In other words, it is our own one, our homeworld, which stands in contrast to many other foreign cultures and alien lifeworlds and which, as our actual lifeworld, has developed historically out of the lives of previous generations and out of the historical lifeworlds of our ancestors. The intercultural and generative–historical constitution of the world starting from our own conception of reality presents itself as a potentially infinite problem of transcending the limits of our present lifeworld or, in the intercultural context, our homeworld.<sup>32</sup> It is at this point that Husserl sees the ultimate conceptual components of our sense of reality as accessible and explorable – i.e., the different cultural and historical lifeworlds belong to the same single, unique *one-world*. The regulative idea of the one-world unfolds teleologically in the intertwined constitutive processes of intercultural and historical expansion.

These are problems that cannot be directly given in actual experience and, therefore, go beyond the limits of phenomenology, which relies on direct evidence. At this point, phenomenology takes on a specifically constructive or speculative character. It continues to rely on direct experience insofar as it starts from phenomena that appear at the limits of direct experience and then, motivated by these liminal experiences, proceed to construct what are shown to be necessary constructs.<sup>33</sup> It is at this point that Husserl sees the *metaphysical dimension of phenomenology* revealed.<sup>34</sup> As part of this, the Husserlian approach to the problem of death also enters a metaphysical dimension that transcends the personal or intersubjective conceptual layers that can be explored phenomenologically.

“Man cannot be immortal. Man necessarily dies. Man has no worldly preexistence, in the spatio-temporal world he was nothing before and he will be nothing after. However, transcendental primordial life, the ultimate world-creating life and its ultimate self cannot arise out of nothing and pass into nothing, it is ‘immortal’,

<sup>32</sup> For the homeworld or alienworld problem and the question of a generative phenomenology in Husserl, see Steinbock’s work (1995).

<sup>33</sup> For the methodological problem of a *constructive phenomenology*, see Eugen Fink’s *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* (1995, p. 7).

<sup>34</sup> Husserl’s late work *Cartesian Meditations* (1960) claims that his “monadological results are metaphysical, if it be true that ultimate cognitions of being should be called metaphysical” (p. 139). The founder of phenomenology, however, sharply distances “his purely intuitive, concrete, and also apodictic mode of demonstration” that “excludes all ‘metaphysical adventure’, all speculative excesses” from the “metaphysics in the customary sense: a historically degenerate metaphysics, which by no means conforms to the sense with which metaphysics, as ‘first philosophy’, was instituted originally.” Thus, Husserl’s intention is to provide an alternative to the traditional metaphysics by consistently relying on the concrete, intuitively evident course of thoughts even at the most extreme points of insights: the ultimate knowledge of being. Our metaphysical constructions must be motivated by perceptual evidence and must return to them; they must be evidently justifiable in them. Therefore, he rejects the “speculative excesses” of thinking, through which, as if “jumping” out of the ultimate – still and already – intuitively evident insights and finding some sort of explanatory first cause or principle for them, we speculatively justify and derive them. See Tengelyi’s work (2014) for an authentic and comprehensive discussion of the problem of phenomenological metaphysics as a new first philosophy.



because death has no meaning for it, etc.“ (Husserl, 1993, p. 338; see also, e.g., Husserl, 1973c, p. 610.) Husserl delineates the traditional metaphysical problems on the conceptual horizon of going beyond the limits of a phenomenological approach based on direct experiential evidence. The transcendence in question, however, is not for him a construction of a new objectivity and of a new level of being – beyond existing people and things. We do not pass into another world. Rather, it is an exploration of the ultimate meaning components of our own world and our own conception of reality, which, though not given in experience, expresses the intellectual presuppositions of the understanding of our possible experience.

Constituting the natural attitude’s conception of death (as well as birth, sleep, and so on) from a transcendental point of view, death as a worldly event is the transcendental ego’s secession from its self-objectification as a human being existing in the world. The self-objectification of transcendental subjectivity, in turn, was shown to be a process of intersubjective, communicative normalisation that constitutes the consciousness of reality for us. Now, we can add that it is a basic meaning component of our conception of reality that the cessation of our own experiential lives does not imply the cessation of the world and of life. The process of transcendental intersubjective world constitution is constantly going on.

Husserl interprets metaphysical problems in relation to this transcendental world-constituting intersubjectivity (or, more precisely, monadic intersubjectivity). The first gesture of going beyond a strictly phenomenological approach is that Husserl – in view of the cessation of waking and experiencing consciousness in sleep, fainting, and death, among others – conceives of transcendental, monadic intersubjectivity as a system of waking *and sleeping* monads. The monads are then understood as *functions* that, when awake in someone, can conceive of something in the world as the same thing (see Husserl, 1973c, p. 610).<sup>35</sup> This “same” as an intersubjectively shared sense becomes the function that persists, dormant or awake, in the ongoing process of the world-constitution of the intersubjective monadic community. It is, in this sense, both that we can conceive, in my view, of monads and monadic intersubjectivity as “transcendental substance” (Husserl, 2006, p. 176) and that we can grasp the Husserlian sense of the *immortality of the soul*.

The same conceptual construct is then the condition of possibility for experiencing other cultural and historical worlds as belonging to the same single one-world – to the same reality. Husserl’s ideas of the *soul–world–god* in relation to monadic intersubjectivity are revealed as the preconditions of possibility for the experience of the one-world in the sense of the single reality. The *soul* as a monadic substance bears the functions of experience. The *world* reveals itself as the overall horizon of all beings in the reality-constituting function of monadic intersubjectivity. *God* is the entelechy unfolding the teleology – the one-world – inherent in the reality-constituting function of monadic intersubjectivity (see Husserl, 1973c, p. 610).

At this point, we can ultimately see that it is on the intellectual horizon of the *divine entelechy* that teleologically unifies the world through the monads and the

<sup>35</sup> According to my understanding, any subjective state and feeling, intention and aspiration, and idea and thought that can be communicated – verbally or non-verbally and consciously or unconsciously – can become such a function.

monadic intersubjectivity that Husserl's assumptions about a particular *transmigration and development of the soul* become intelligible: "Perhaps every monad has many individual lives in which even the Leibnizian idea of 'transmigration', of transcendental 'development', could be conceived." (Husserl, 2006, p. 177). The monad as a function center of transcendental intersubjectivity is awakened, "embodied", and born again and again when, for instance, one learns to see an airplane, begins to philosophise, speak, or think at all, or show any elementary, shareable subjectivity as a living being. To this extent, we identify ourselves with people and beings who have lived before, and they – or, more precisely, the realised function – live on in us and in others.

The "*reincarnation of the soul*" conceived in this way also implies the possibility of a transcendental "development of the soul." Husserl says, "In the usual sense, then, immortality is impossible. But man is immortal, like all monads, immortal is his share in the process of self-realisation of divinity, immortal is his progress in all that is real and good" (Husserl, 1973c, p. 610). This "participation" and "progress" in the process of the self-realisation of the deity (as "in truth and good"), as the next sentence of the text indicates, is to be found in the "self-identification" with, as human beings, or the realisation of certain functions from the potentialities already inherent in the monad as an inheritance, which is previously acquired and implemented by others (ibid.). The same idea also points to the possibility of a "*development of the soul*": we can not only realise already acquired potentialities but also create new ones that are to be incorporated into inherited acquisitions.

It is also within the horizon of divine entelechy, which unifies the whole world, that Husserl's ideas on historicity can be ultimately understood. Husserl's interpretation of *history* has three levels (1954, pp. 502–503: ["Beilage XXVI: Stufen der Geschichtlichkeit. Erste Geschichtlichkeit"]): organic historicity, the unfolding of the idea of a single one-world born with philosophy, and the transformation of philosophy into phenomenology. To elaborate, organic history, when a new meaning is woven into the understanding of our world, is not consciously directed towards the one-world. Philosophical life is consciously directed towards the one-world, but the rest of humanity is such only insofar as philosophy has gained a place in organic development. According to Husserl, a new perspective opens up when the purely speculative metaphysical idea of the one-world is transformed by the transformation of philosophy into phenomenology, which, through the progressive thoughts of generations, can become a factor that actually permeates real experience.

Phenomenology as a scientific philosophy grasps, both comprehensively and in its details, the world (Husserl, 1954, p. 497) in the unity of a systematic, universal context of meaning constitution, starting from the actual experience of each one of us. Thus, through phenomenology, everyone can, on the one hand, participate in the historical shaping of the universe through their own volitional choice and participate in the process of self-realisation of the divine through this particular philosophical "self-realisation."<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, the reintegration of the sciences into the system of phenomenological philosophy would offer the chance for the whole of intel-

<sup>36</sup> See Husserl (2008) for philosophy acting as a universal science and as "an atheistic path to god" (p. 167) and Husserl (2013) for philosophy functioning as "a non-confessional path to god" (p. 259).

lectual life to be permeated by this goal – through work that would be carried on for generations. Husserl hoped that phenomenology could make the divine entelechy that pervades reality consciously willed and unfolded, and thus, philosophers may, in this way, serve “as a functionary of humanity” (Husserl, 1970, p. 71).<sup>37</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

We have come to the end of our exploration of the Husserlian phenomenological approach to death. Looking back at the path we have traveled, we can summarise the main steps and insights as follows:

Regarding our starting point – the conception of death in the natural attitude – we have drawn attention to the fundamental ambiguity whereby our own direct experiential perspective overlaps with the perspective of others, to which we do not have direct access. When, in the natural attitude, we take death to be a worldly event based on the experience of the death of others, we do not differentiate between the problem of how we experience death and the question of the meaning and significance of death for us, creating ambiguity. We have turned to philosophical reflection – late Husserlian transcendental phenomenology – with the expectation that it will provide us with a better intellectual opportunity to clarify this ambiguity.

The first result of this journey of transcendental phenomenological meaning clarification was the realisation that what appears in the natural attitude as the death of others and as the experience of their disappearance from the world, now, from a transcendental point of view, takes on the meaning of being removed from the world from within: we lose our world by being seceded from our communicative communities.

The second circle of insights resulted from the finitude of our personalities. Three features were highlighted: First, we grasped the significance of death in the constant threat of becoming permanently unconscious. Then, we interpreted death as a permanent possibility of the disintegration of the personality. Finally, the confrontation with our finitude led us to the limitation of human nature realised or realisable in ourselves.

In the third step, we sought to elucidate Husserl’s particular idea of “phenomenological immortality” in relation to the innermost core of our subjectivity: the ever-living present of our self, the “transcendental ego.” In fact, we pointed out that all ongoing experience presupposes preceding and following inner temporal experiences and that, consequently, it is not possible to experience a future moment that could be a kind of “last moment” of life without performative self-contradiction. Based on this insight, we could “turn back” to the higher layers of subjectivity and shed light on the paradoxical significance of the immortality of the transcendental ego: for us as persons, as selves in a community, and as human beings existing in a world, it is

<sup>37</sup> “For we are what we are as functionaries of modern philosophical humanity; we are heirs and cobearers of the direction of the will which pervades this humanity; we have become this through a primal establishment which is at once a reestablishment [*Nachstiftung*] and a modification of the Greek primal establishment. In the latter lies the *teleological beginning*, the true birth of the European spirit as such.”

only by presupposing this peculiar immortality that it becomes possible to approach our mortality.

Then, we returned to our starting point: the experience of death as a worldly event. With the background of our transcendental reflection carried out previously, we had the possibility, however, to understand our natural attitude from its transcendental phenomenological origins and to see ourselves and our experiences in the world as subjective and intersubjective constitutive performances. It was then that we could properly understand Husserl's formulaic definition of death as "the secession of the transcendental ego from its self-objectification as man." From this position, new points of significance of death opened up for us. On the one hand, we have seen that only the inevitable occurrence of death in the world allows us to radically separate the experiences of others from our own. On the other hand, it has been revealed that only this radical separation makes it possible for us to understand the possibility of experiencing such a world and a time by others – independent of us and objective for us – which goes beyond our own experience and will continue to exist after our death. With this transcendental step of questioning beyond our death, our reflections arrived in their final, metaphysical dimension. We have been led by a quest to make sense of the elementary layer of our understanding of reality, according to which the cessation of our life does not mean the cessation of neither the world nor the life. The process of intersubjective world constitution is going on.

It has been argued that Husserl interprets the metaphysical problems beyond the limits of a phenomenological approach based on direct phenomenological evidence in terms of the higher – generative, intercultural, and historical – dimensions of transcendental world-constituting intersubjectivity. In Husserl's view, the ultimate idea of the one-world is the condition of possibility for experiencing other cultural and historical worlds as belonging to the same reality. The idea of "soul-world-god" of traditional metaphysics in relation to monadic intersubjectivity is also revealed by Husserl as the intellectual condition for the experience of the reality as a single world. The "soul" is a monadic substance bearing the functions of experience, while the "world" is the overall horizon of all beings constituted by the constant functioning of monadic intersubjectivity. Finally, "god" is the entelechy unfolding the teleology – the one-world – inherent in the reality-constituting function of monadic intersubjectivity. Ultimately, it is on the conceptual horizon of participation in the process of self-realisation of the divine – the teleologically unifying divine entelechy pervading the world through the monadic beings – that Husserl's assumptions concerning a specific transmigration or development of the soul become intelligible.

We have come a long way following Husserl: starting from our initial situation, the natural conception of death, and moving on to the ultimate metaphysical problems. The path we have travelled has also, I hope, highlighted the possibility of an intellectual development for the reader through the stages of a personal and reflective confrontation with death.

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## Declarations

The author states that there is no conflict of interest.

**Ethical Approval** This article does not contain any studies performed by the author with human participants or animals.

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