



# THE CREATIVITY OF LIFE: HUSSERL, HENRY AND BEYOND

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## ABSTRACT

This work investigates the nature of transcendental subjectivity, and whether and how the subject can endeavour to know and attest to its absolute foundation with its essential structures. Towards this end, I take up the respective transcendental projects of Edmund Husserl and Michel Henry. I argue that while Henry's identification of transcendental subjectivity with the bodily life of the subject helps further our understanding of these matters as initially laid out in Husserl, his position requires revision, as it points toward, but fails to sufficiently develop, the finite (intentional) and destructive character of the phenomenological life of the living individual. Accordingly, I contend that transcendental subjectivity can be understood neither as an absolute consciousness (Husserl), nor as a divine, a-cosmic flesh (Henry), but must be acknowledged as nothing other than the finite, embodied person in her ineluctable bond with the world, one which harbours both life and death drives. In light of this finding, I suggest that the living subject can most fully come to know and attest to the foundation of her being not only through the practice of phenomenology, but through other forms of culture such as art, ethics and science as well.

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

Declaration: I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and does not contain the work of any other individual. All sources that have been consulted have been identified and acknowledged in the appropriate way.

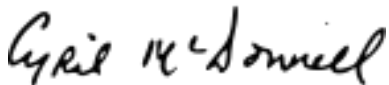
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	Learning How to See: Husserl's Methodology 15
1.1	Husserl's Breakthrough: The A Priori Correlation of Acts and Their Intentional Objects 16
1.2	The Concept of Evidence 24
1.3	The First Moment of the Phenomenological Reduction: The Epoche 33
1.4	The Second Moment of the Phenomenological Reduction: The Reduction Proper 41
Chapter 2	Husserl's Analytic of Constitution 50
2.1	The Privilege of Perception 51
2.2	Flesh and Body 58
2.3	Passive Synthesis 63
2.4	The Depths of Time 66
2.5	Absolute Time-Constituting Consciousness 72
2.6	The Mystery of Inner Time-Consciousness 81
Chapter 3	The Productive Force of Life: Henry's Immanent Critique of Husserl 90
3.1	Henry, Husserl and Descartes 91
3.2	The Immanent Appearing of the <i>Cogito</i> 94
3.3	The Primal Sensing of Thought 98
3.4	The Embodied <i>Cogito</i> 100
3.5	The Generative Movement of Life 104
3.6	The Arch-Presence of Life 112
3.7	Primal Selfhood 116
3.8	The Question of Divine Genesis 118
3.9	A Turn to Christianity 121
3.10	The World of Life 127
3.11	Orders of Constitution 131

	3.12 The Absolute Priority of Affectivity	134
Chapter 4	Putting Life to the Test: Culture and Barbarism	142
	4.1 Self-Growth as The Foundation of Culture	143
	4.2 The Artistic Form of Culture	146
	4.3 A Theory of Form and Colour	151
	4.4 Art as Normative Culture	156
	4.5 The Ramifications of Normative Life	163
	4.6 Barbarism and Modernity	166
	4.7 The Modern Marriage of Science, Technology and Economics	171
	4.8 The Malaise of Life	175
	4.9 Second Birth	181
	4.10 Rethinking the Unity of Affectivity and Intentionality	189
Chapter 5	Returning Life to the World	197
	5.1 Re-conceiving Transcendental Phenomenology	197
	5.2 The Hidden Art of the Soul	203
	5.3 Background Feelings	209
	5.4 Affectively Driven Consciousness	215
	5.5 The Drive for Destruction	219
	5.6 Towards the Full Presence of Things	224
	5.7 Trust, World and Others	228
	5.8 Layers of Intersubjectivity	235
Chapter 6	Becoming Fully Alive	246
	6.1 Life's Unity of Motivation and the Natural Attitude	247
	6.2 Wonder and the Problematisation of the World's Obviousness	249
	6.3 Art	253
	6.4 Love	259
	6.5 Ethics	262

6.6	The Dark Side of Feeling	267
6.7	A Chorus of Voices	276
	Conclusion	284
	Bibliography	294



## INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the nature of transcendental subjectivity, and whether and how the subject can come to know and attest to its absolute foundation with its essential structures. It will do this by taking up the respective transcendental projects of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Michel Henry (1922-2002). Both of these figures stand out in the history of phenomenology for their radical claim that the ultimate foundation of transcendental subjectivity can, in some way, be given absolutely, and that it is therefore possible to establish an absolute knowledge of all experience.

Husserl contends that it is principally the phenomenological method that unlocks the transcendental dimension, and which allows the subject to attest to the innermost nature of the transcendental ego (i.e. who or what it is and how it functions). In his view, the history of philosophy has thus far failed to attain true and lasting knowledge of the absolute origin and beginning of all givenness and knowledge owing to its hidden assumptions and prejudices, in particular the unquestioned assumption contained in what Husserl called ‘the general thesis of the natural attitude’.<sup>1</sup> In this attitude, in perception I take the world of things to be ‘simply there’ (*vorhanden*), whether my attention is directed towards them or not. Thus, in this natural attitude, the transcendental source of the intelligibility of our experiences in human consciousness is overlooked. If phenomenology is to obtain systematic absoluteness — i.e. clarity concerning the essential features or essence of the world as presented to our actual experiences — then it needs to free itself from such naïve realism and its supporting suppositions and biases, which have remained unquestioned since the evolution of philosophy itself down

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General introduction to pure phenomenology*, trans. by Fred Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983), p. 51. Henceforth, abbreviated as *Ideas I*.

through the millennia. In order to attain true knowledge of this source, therefore, Husserl believes that phenomenology must first attain a certain historical absoluteness;<sup>2</sup> that is to say, it must free itself from these wayward philosophical traditions, their implicit assumptions and prejudices, and establish itself as a radically new philosophy of human consciousness itself with a new method.

According to Husserl, it is the transcendental reduction that clears the way for this radically new form of philosophy, and the eidetic reduction that renders philosophy as a rigorous science. In brief, by performing both reductions, it is said that the phenomenologist attains an unbiased, presuppositionless position from which she can reflectively elucidate the essential, universal structures of the world. In doing so, Husserl is led back to transcendental subjectivity, which he equates with absolute consciousness, as the *a priori* foundation of the meaningfulness of all life and being (i.e. intelligibility).<sup>3</sup> In claiming that the way in which we know all objects has to do with *a priori* relations between our human subjectivity and the world (i.e. knowable objectivity), Husserl's philosophy assumes a transcendental register in the vein of Immanuel

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<sup>2</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. by Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Some contemporary scholars, such as James Mensch, query whether Husserl did not begin to question this position in his later work. See James Mensch, *Husserl's Account of our Consciousness of Time* (Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2010), pp. 220, 245. Such scholars tend to focus on Husserl's late, unpublished manuscripts as evidence for this view. However, it should be noted that, although these late works display a greater attentiveness to the role of the body in the constitution of the world, Husserl himself never explicitly asserts that the transcendental ego is embodied through and through. Additionally, as is well-known, Husserl would often undertake these research manuscripts as a way of exploring a particular theme from a variety of positions and assessing their merits and shortcomings. These manuscripts did not, therefore, always reflect his own philosophical position at the time. As a result, one must proceed with caution in the interpretation of these manuscripts. More generally, let us join Brian Elliott in acknowledging that, indeed, a 'new "radical orthodoxy"' appears to have settled in amongst certain contemporary Husserl scholars (e.g. Dan Zahavi and Natalie Depraz), whereby the insights gleaned from more recent thinkers such as Heidegger, Levinas and Henry, are taken and retroactively assigned to none other than Husserl himself. Brian Elliott, *Phenomenology and Imagination in Husserl and Heidegger* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 136, note 3; *Self-Awareness, Temporality, and Alterity: Central Topics in Phenomenology*, ed. by Dan Zahavi (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998). Though one may appreciate the positions that emerge from these figures as novel and important insights in their own right, as readings of Husserl, they can leave much to be desired. Our work here, while drawing on some of Husserl's late manuscripts when they supplement his views, will focus on elucidating and critically examining Husserl's own philosophical positions.

Kant. Kant similarly maintained that transcendental philosophy has to do with cognition ‘which is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our *a priori* concepts of objects in general’.<sup>4</sup> That is to say, for Kant, transcendental philosophy has to do with the concepts that function as the conditions that make possible the cognition of objects.

What distinguishes Husserl’s transcendental philosophy from Kant’s, however, is his contention that the foundation of transcendental subjectivity can be given absolutely. As Lilian Alweiss notes, both Kant and Husserl locate the ultimate source that makes possible the appearing of appearances in a primal impression — i.e. the transcendental object = X in Kant, and sensuous data in Husserl — which functions as a correlate of transcendental consciousness.<sup>5</sup> For both, this impression serves to ‘animate and structure [i.e. constitute] the appearing’.<sup>6</sup> While for Kant this ultimate source is a logical beginning, in the sense of something that ‘needs to be *thought* yet cannot be manifested’, Husserl’s phenomenology takes a bold step and maintains that it can and must be revealed.<sup>7</sup> Thus, as Alweiss correctly concludes, ‘Husserl’s crucial departure from Kant is his attempt to make manifest transcendental consciousness’.<sup>8</sup> Husserl’s phenomenology claims to manifest ‘that which [Kant’s] critical philosophy posits’.<sup>9</sup> The absolute beginning that Husserl seeks is, therefore, not a merely intelligible one, but one that he believes can be given absolutely.

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<sup>4</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 133.

<sup>5</sup> Lilian Alweiss, *The World Unclaimed: A Challenge to Heidegger’s Critique of Husserl* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), pp. 46, 51; Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 347-348.

<sup>6</sup> Alweiss, *The World Unclaimed*, p. 48.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

Furthermore, since phenomenology endeavours to attain genuine insight into the foundation of all forms of knowledge, Husserl acknowledges that a truly rigorous phenomenology must provide an account of its own methodology. As he stipulates as early as *Ideas I*,

phenomenology, by virtue of its essence, must claim to be ‘first’ philosophy and to offer the means for carrying out every possible critique of reason; therefore, it demands the most perfect freedom from presuppositions and, concerning itself, an absolute reflective insight. It is of its own essence to realize the most perfect clarity concerning its own essence and therefore also concerning the principles of its method.<sup>10</sup>

In order to function as first philosophy, then, phenomenology, as Husserl understands it, must attain an ‘absolute reflective insight’ regarding the basic principles of its own method.<sup>11</sup> To serve as first philosophy, a truly rigorous phenomenology must not only thematise the inner nature of transcendental subjectivity and its essential features, but the methodological procedures that have been used to arrive at such findings as well. Husserl must, therefore, provide a coherent and compelling account of the details of his procedure. He must, for example, provide an account of the motivation that is responsible for bringing the subject to undertake this transcendental reduction and, of no less importance, explain who or what this transcendental ego really is, how it relates to the empirical ego, and how we should understand its constitutive ‘accomplishments’ (*Leistungen*) at its most basic levels. Only once this has been done may phenomenology be said to attain an absolute knowledge of the final and true absolute of all life and being.

The fundamental question that remains is whether Husserl’s phenomenology is in fact able to reflectively elucidate the innermost nature of transcendental subjectivity,

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<sup>10</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 148.

<sup>11</sup> In this, Husserl informs us that he is following his mentor, Franz Brentano, and his appeal to ‘intuition’ as the basis of the latter’s ‘new descriptive science’ of consciousness, which Husserl first encountered whilst attending his lectures on ‘descriptive psychology’ at Vienna University from 1884-1886. See Edmund Husserl, ‘Reminiscences of Franz Brentano’, trans. and ed. by Linda L. McAlister, in *The Philosophy of Brentano* (London: Duckworth, 1976), pp. 47–55.

as well as the procedures it has followed along the way. Is Husserl's reflective methodology able to seize upon the innermost depths of the transcendental ego? Does it sufficiently elucidate exactly who or what this transcendental ego is and how we should understand its most basic constitutive accomplishments?

According to French phenomenologist Michel Henry, Husserl's intentional phenomenology, as well as much of the history of Western thought, has failed to provide an adequate account of the inner nature of transcendental subjectivity and how it functions. On account of this, Henry believes they have failed to appreciate the way in which the ultimate foundation of transcendental subjectivity is in fact given absolutely. The history of Western thought, Henry says, has failed to understand this absolute foundation of all that is, this *Parousia* or perfect and indubitable self-presence, owing to the ontological monism that has oriented it from its onset with the ancient Greeks. For Henry, this ontological monism consists in the unquestioned assumption that there is only one mode of appearing, that of transcendence, understood as the opening of a distance or outside, which enables objects to appear before our gaze.<sup>12</sup> By construing appearing in this way, Henry claims that the history of Western thought has unduly limited the field of appearing to object-manifestation, to the appearance of things to the gaze of a subject, such that something is, if, and only if it can be seen by a subject.

Henry sees his basic task as overturning this tradition of ontological monism and clarifying the nature of transcendental subjectivity, with a view to demonstrating how its ultimate foundation is given to us in an absolute manner.<sup>13</sup> As he states in the opening sentence of his first magnum opus *The Essence of Manifestation*, 'this book was born of

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<sup>12</sup> Michel Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, trans. by Girard Etzkorn (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p. 89.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Douglas Brick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 41.

a refusal, the refusal of the very philosophy from which it has sprung'.<sup>14</sup> From beginning to end, Henry's work remains remarkably steadfast in its focus on this basic task. While Henry takes up what might at first blush strike one as a strangely eclectic array of topics, from aesthetics, to psychoanalysis, Marxism, Christianity, and so on, his fundamental concern always remains centred on refining and drawing out further the inner nature of transcendental subjectivity and how it functions.

In this sense, as critical as Henry is of Husserl, perhaps no thinker has done as much to try and realise his ambition of sufficiently clarifying the nature of transcendental subjectivity, and of demonstrating how its absolute foundation can be given absolutely. Our attempt to provide a more adequate account of transcendental subjectivity, and to address whether and how the subject can attest to its ultimate foundation, will thus be both guided and furthered by a critical evaluation of the success and coherency of Henry's phenomenological project.

As we will show, Henry maintains that the mode of appearing (i.e. the inner nature of transcendental subjectivity) that Husserl and the history of philosophy have overlooked is that of life, understood as the way in which the self appears to itself in the radically immanent, non-intentional and non-objectifying self-affection that is its subjective body or flesh.<sup>15</sup> In Henry's view, it is this radically immanent and affective appearing of life that serves as the true transcendental dimension. In this case, transcendental subjectivity, which constitutes the foundation of the ecstatic appearing of the world and of the reality of everything that is, must be understood as this pure bodily life of the subject.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, p. xi.

<sup>15</sup> Henry employs a variety of terms to describe this body. Apart from referring to it as a subjective body, he also describes it as the transcendental body, the living body, and the flesh.

<sup>16</sup> Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, p. 511.

Where Husserl advances a conception of transcendental subjectivity as a pure, disembodied ego, Henry's material phenomenology forces us to reconsider the central role of bodily life in our understanding of subjectivity.<sup>17</sup> As Karl Hefty observes in his introduction to Henry's *Incarnation*, unlike Husserl, Henry's transcendental project is not ideal in that 'it describes life as such, and to that extent also flesh'.<sup>18</sup> As a result, while Husserl's intentional phenomenology tends to privilege the role of objectifying acts of consciousness (i.e. apperceptive objectification) in his account of the constitution of the world, Henry's material phenomenology gives an unprecedented level of attention to the role of affectivity in the constitution of self and world. Indeed, in our view, the true and enduring spirit of Henry's thought consists in its attempt to further our awareness of the decisive importance of affectivity in the constitution of this world of life.

The boldness of Henry's account of this transcendental life can hardly be overstated. In his later work, Henry draws a distinction between the flesh of the finite individual, and that of an infinite and absolute life or God, where the former is immanently engendered by and depends upon the latter, such that, as he provocatively writes in *I am the Truth*, '[i]n the depths of its night, our flesh is God.'<sup>19</sup> If we accept this, then, at heart, transcendental subjectivity would consist in the eternal life of God, in the eternal self-production of this absolute life, and in the movement of self-generation by which God continuously affects and thereby engenders himself and all of the living.

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<sup>17</sup> Henry also refers to his work as 'radical phenomenology', or as a 'phenomenology of life'.

<sup>18</sup> Michel Henry, *Incarnation: A Philosophy of Flesh*, trans. by Karl Hefty (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), p. xiii.

<sup>19</sup> Michel Henry, *I Am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, trans. by Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 373.

Despite the fact that Henry regards the life of the finite individual as immanently enjoined with that of absolute life, he admits nonetheless that the former can somehow forget its basis in the latter. When this occurs, and the subject falls under the illusion that she is the author of her own acts, and that her identity consists in her finite intentional existence in the world, Henry claims that the living subject begins to grow tired and sick of her life and becomes bent on its destruction and death (what he terms ‘barbarism’). In a significant divergence from Husserl, Henry argues that it is not only, or even primarily, through phenomenology that the living individual can rediscover and attest to her basis in absolute life, but first and foremost through an engagement in what Henry regards as high culture, through an ethical, aesthetic and religious form of action, which does not depend upon intentionality. Might this be what Jean-Luc Marion had an intimation of when he wrote that Henry’s thought contains within itself ‘a possibility still scarcely glimpsed’?<sup>20</sup> that is to say, that the living subject may come to know and attest to the first principles of knowledge which have always eluded philosophy through a particular way of feeling and acting.

We need, nevertheless, to ask whether Henry’s conception of the transcendental life of the subject is in fact sustainable. Can the purely generative movement of this immanent and non-intentional life of the subject adequately account for the richness and diversity of its experience, and for all of the transformations that the finite subject undergoes, including the loss and rediscovery of her basis in absolute life? We will argue that Henry’s own analyses, in contrast to his assertions, indicate that the phenomenological life of the subject has, in fact, a finite intentional formal structure, and that this life not only involves a constant productivity (what Henry refers to as ‘life’s drive for

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<sup>20</sup> Michel Henry, *Phénoménologie de la vie, Tome I: De la phénoménologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003), p. 8. All translations in this thesis are my own unless otherwise stated.



growth'), but also a drive for destruction (a death drive). In this thesis, therefore, we argue that while Henry's identification of transcendental subjectivity with the bodily life of the subject helps further our understanding of this matter as initially laid out by Husserl, his position requires revision, as it points toward, but fails to sufficiently develop, the finite (intentional) and destructive character of the phenomenological life of the living individual.

This, in turn, requires us to diverge from Henry's conception of life in a significant way, re-opening the question of how we should understand the nature of transcendental subjectivity, as well as how the subject can properly come to know and attest to its innermost depths. Indeed, if, in light of our study of Henry, we acknowledge the absolutely basic character of bodily life, and the fact that this life is not radically immanent and thereby closed off from the world, but always already open to it, then can we still speak of a *transcendental* life? What is more, if life cannot be understood as a radically immanent movement of self-generation, as Henry argues, then how should it be understood? And if we insist on the ecstatic and intentional structure of life, do we not thereby lose or diminish Henry's insights into the essential role of life's pre-reflective and non-objectifying affectivity in the constitution of the world, as Henry himself suggests? Finally, under this new understanding of the life of the subject, how, if at all, can she attest to the basis of her being?

In order to begin to assess these critical issues regarding the nature of transcendental subjectivity, we will first take up the work of Husserl. Since Husserl contends that it is the performance of the reductions that enables the subject to access the transcendental field of experience, and to reflectively thematise the innermost nature of transcendental subjectivity and its essential structures, the first chapter of this work presents a critical exposition of this methodology. In our analysis of the intricacies of

this methodological procedure, we will argue that, although Husserl makes it clear that there must be a union between the transcendental and empirical egos, he does not address the nature of this union at sufficient length. It thus, ultimately, remains unclear just who or what this transcendental ego really is.

Chapter two then puts this methodology into practice. Doing so will allow us to unpack and draw attention to some of those structures that Husserl finds to be essential to transcendental subjectivity, and to begin to get a sense for his understanding of the latter's inner nature. At the same time, we will assess whether this procedure enables Husserl to make good on his claim that the absolute foundation of transcendental subjectivity can be absolutely given to us in phenomenological reflection. We will argue that Husserl's own study of time inadvertently reveals that transcendental subjectivity has an ultimate foundation that can never be given absolutely. His analyses indicate that the living present, or what may be called the pre-temporal event of life, as the ultimate level of absolute time-constituting consciousness, functions as an anonymous level of sense that can never be presented to our gaze. In other words, Husserl's analyses reveal that the immanence of consciousness is always already broken, that there is a primordial transcendence, or unconscious consciousness, that makes consciousness possible, while always remaining beyond its grasp. However, if this is the case, and the pre-temporal event of life functions as an anonymous level of sense that can never be captured or understood in terms of apperceptive objectification, then it remains less than clear as to how this most basic level of constitution should be understood.

In an effort to further our understanding of who or what transcendental subjectivity really is and how it functions, chapter three examines Henry's material phenomenology as a critique of Husserl's version of transcendental phenomenology. In this chapter, we will argue that Henry's work sheds light on the fact that transcendental sub-

jectivity is not an absolute consciousness, but the actual, living, embodied individual, understood in its immanent and affective self-appearing, whereas the empirical ego is the one and the same ego as displayed in the world's ecstatic mode of appearing. In this case, Henry's work suggests that the most basic functioning of transcendental subjectivity must be understood as a matter of generation, as an unconscious movement of affectivity that produces itself and all of its needs and drives. In exploring this position, we argue that, on the one hand, it remains a point of some contention regarding whether this transcendental life of the individual should at heart be understood as finite and human, or as eternal and divine. What is more, in his account of these two modes of appearing, we maintain that Henry fails to adequately account for how the two are united, and instead leaves us with a problematic bifurcation of the modes of appearing. For all these unresolved issues, nevertheless, Henry's phenomenology of life sheds light on the importance of the affectivity of the subjective body in the constitution of the world. According to Henry, it is the affective drives of life that unilaterally found and guide the subject in all of her actions. Additionally, Henry contends that it is in this pre-reflective and non-objectifying self-sensing of the flesh that things are absolutely given to the subject, and that it is only this transcendental feeling which can provide the individual with absolute knowledge of its ultimate foundation and of everything that is.

In order to determine the validity of these monumental findings on the part of Henry, chapter four evaluates his position by taking up a dimension of Henry's thought that has received relatively little attention thus far, namely, his study of culture (i.e. acts of self-growth) and barbarism (i.e. acts of self-destruction). It is here that Henry's theoretical understanding of life is fleshed out in terms of the way in which it actually oper-

ates in our everyday life.<sup>21</sup> In so doing, it will be found that, contrary to his assertions, Henry's own analyses, as well as 'the things themselves', indicate that life is not only a productive but also a destructive movement, and that this movement is finite and intentional in nature.

On account of these development, the onus will fall on us to determine what these findings mean for our understanding of transcendental subjectivity and the way in which the subject can come to know and attest to the basis of her being. Chapter five gets underway with this by arguing that while our findings force us to modify or weaken the sense of transcendental subjectivity advanced in Husserl and Henry, it does not abolish it altogether. Instead, we are forced to acknowledge that transcendental subjectivity consists neither in an absolute consciousness, nor in an a pure, a-cosmic life, but in a finite bodily life that is always already exposed to the world. By drawing on the work of Henry, Husserl, and other contemporary thinkers, while also critically extending and diverging from their findings, we will draw out the nature of this transcendental subjectivity and its essential structures. In so doing, we will advance a conception of life that is able to maintain Henry's insight into the essential role of non-objectifying affectivity in the constitution of the world, but which simultaneously acknowledges and develops its finite (intentional) and destructive character. This means, in part, that the unconscious movement of affectivity should not be understood as a matter of immanent generation, but as an ecstatic creation that, as such, can never be seen but only felt in a vague or indeterminate manner. One of the consequences of this is that, contrary to the assertions of Husserl and Henry, transcendental subjectivity has a ground which can never be given absolutely. At the same time, as we will show, it also opens the door to-

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<sup>21</sup> Henry also explores this in his two volumes study of Marx. See *Marx 1: une philosophie de la réalité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976); and *Marx 2: une philosophie de l'économie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976). However, as a proper study of these volumes would require a work all its own, we will not focus extensively on them here.

ward a richer and more coherent understanding of how the subject constitutes the world, one which recognises that both affectivity and apperceptive objectification are essential to this process.

With this emergent sense of transcendental subjectivity having been established, in chapter six we will be in a position to assess how the subject can attest to the fundamentals of her being. We will begin by arguing that it is none other than the needs and drives of life that serve as the unity of motivation which determines the course of consciousness, and which thereby enables the individual to problematise her natural attitude and to assume some distance towards it. We will demonstrate how the natural attitude arises from the living subject's felt sense of trust in others and the world, and will argue that the subject assumes some distance towards this attitude by undergoing a type of shock, one which is commonly experienced in a positive or negative valence of wonder or awe, as well as in negative feelings such as boredom. However this shock occurs, we maintain that the ensuing problematisation of the natural attitude can indeed be carried out in high forms of cultural activity apart from that of phenomenology, among them, art, ethics and science. In this sense, Henry was not wrong in emphasising that the living subject can come to know and attest to the nature of life and its essential structures in ways of life that stand outside that of phenomenology. Yet, as our study will bear out, he is mistaken in his insistence that this can be accomplished through an affective life that requires no assistance from objectifying acts of reflection. As we will demonstrate, in all of the ways in which the subject assumes some distance towards the world, objectifying acts of reflection can play an important role in problematising the natural attitude, and in thereby furthering the growth of life. In whichever way the living individual participates in this pursuit, in doing so, we suggest that the subject participates in a

veritable community of love and generosity, one which is collectively bent on furthering the growth of life in oneself and others in myriad ways.

## CHAPTER 1

### LEARNING HOW TO SEE: HUSSERL'S METHODOLOGY

For Husserl, phenomenology is a study of our human consciousness. In his view, if we are to examine our consciousness and its objectivities, and to seize upon its ultimate foundation, then we need a special kind of method of enquiry. In order to understand and assess Husserl's radical claim that phenomenology can unlock and reach the absolute foundation of existence as a whole in consciousness, we thus need to follow and understand first the methodological procedures that guide it. This chapter, therefore, begins with a critical exposition of Husserl's methodology. As Husserl applies his methodology to a study of things, however, initially as the study of the 'essences' of our normatively valid logical consciousness as such in his *Logical Investigations* and then as the study of 'pure intentional consciousness' itself in *Ideas I*, that method changes. This chapter, therefore, distinguishes and addresses some of the key elements that figure in this development, focusing on intuition as the principle of all principles, the eidetic reduction, and the transcendental-phenomenological reduction. Commentators and critics of Husserl's philosophy, nevertheless, differ in their interpretations as to 'what the reductions are and how they relate to one another'.<sup>1</sup> In particular, Husserl's transcendental-phenomenological reduction is a major source of controversy, with some commentators seeing it as being either a betrayal of his earlier endeavour to return to the things themselves, or an impossibility for phenomenology and phenomenological research that should be rejected altogether. Husserl himself, nonetheless, insists that the reductions — both the eidetic and the transcendental-phenomenological reductions —

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<sup>1</sup> Dagfinn Føllesdal, 'Husserl on Evidence and Justification', *Edmund Husserl and the Phenomenological Tradition*, ed. by Robert Sokolowski (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), pp. 107-129 (p. 105).

are of central importance to his elaboration of a phenomenological philosophy in its attempt to fully manifest the absolute foundation and beginning of existence as a whole. This chapter, therefore, concentrates on establishing what these reductions are, how they relate to one another, whilst drawing attention to some important aspects of these procedures that still remain unclear.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.1 HUSSERL'S BREAKTHROUGH: THE *A PRIORI* CORRELATION OF ACTS AND THEIR INTENTIONAL OBJECTS

In order to understand Husserl's transcendental methods, we first need to know some of the basic structures of Husserl's phenomenology, especially his account of the intentionality of consciousness and its fundamental demand for evidence. By demonstrating how and why Husserl comes to formulate these structures, we will be in a better position to understand the meaning of his methodological procedures, as well as the distinctive roles of the respective reductions and how they relate to one another.

The development of Husserl's methodological procedures is motivated by his attempt to address the long-standing philosophical problem as to what knowledge really is and how the human being can access it.<sup>3</sup> Going back to the ancient Greeks, philosophy has always wanted to overcome prejudice and attain true knowledge, as opposed to mere opinion or belief. As Klaus Held notes,

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<sup>2</sup> Despite the pivotal importance of the transcendental reduction in Husserl's work, as Dan Zahavi notes, his account of it is 'not always crystal clear'. Dan Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 76.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl's doctrine of the intuition of essences, however, is a solution to the problem of the empirical origins of *a priori* judgements (knowledge-claims such as, e.g., colour implies extension) that neither Kant nor Hume could justify — it is thus a post-Humean-Kantian epistemological concern that is not found in ancient Greek philosophy: it is rather a 'modern problem' and one that Brentano in his descriptive empirical psychology attempted to address, but insufficiently according to Husserl. For more on this, see Theodorus de Boer, 'The Descriptive Method of Franz Brentano: Its Two Functions and Their Significance for Phenomenology', in *The Philosophy of Franz Brentano*, ed. by Linda L. McAlister (London: Duckworth, 1976), pp. 101-107.



[a]s Plato originally formulated it: *episteme*, true knowledge, should take the place of *doxa*, opinion. Opinion falls short of true knowledge in two ways. First, certain vacillations which are ‘due to the situation’ always underlie opinions. True knowledge should be free from subjective biases in changing lived situations, and in this sense, it should be ‘objective’ and lasting. Second, whenever we just have an opinion, we are making an unfulfilled knowledge claim. For example, when someone says, ‘I think it is too hot in Italy in August’, or ‘I think that the Pythagorean theorem is provable’, that person is saying, my point of view could be verified by my driving to Italy in the summer, or by my actually carrying out the proof of the theorem. In this way, simple opinion refers through its meaning to situations in which what is meant would be proved, fulfilled, confirmed. Such situations bring us close to the issue or the matter at hand, which is only given to us ‘from a distance’, so to speak, through opinions.<sup>4</sup>

On Held’s reading, there is a certain tension to this account of true knowledge. On the one hand, to attain true knowledge, we must get as close to things as possible; we must experience them in a direct and immediate way in the course of our experience. On the other hand, true knowledge also requires that we free ourselves of the subjective biases that colour our ever-changing circumstances. True knowledge must be lasting and objective; it must be independent of the particular circumstances in question.

Rather than resolve this tension by simply choosing one side over the other — the subjective or the objective — Husserl’s thought is distinguished by the rigorous way in which it attempts to stay true to it.<sup>5</sup> He does this by trying to demonstrate how the attainment of objective knowledge is essentially connected to subjective sources, without being reducible to them. To be able to have knowledge of something at all, Husserl acknowledges that the subject must be able to achieve a basic closeness to it and to thereby experience it in its originarity. That is to say, he recognises that a necessary condition for true knowledge is that the object or state of affairs in question must appear or be able to appear within the scope of my experience. In this sense, all appearance

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<sup>4</sup> Klaus Held, ‘Husserl’s Phenomenological Method’, in *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Donn Welton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 3-31 (p. 7).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

and knowledge is necessarily subject-relative. Something can appear and be known only when it presents itself to a subject in a particular situation (i.e. in its subject-relative manners of givenness).

At the same time, Husserl does not reduce knowledge to a matter of mere subjectivity. His work bears the acknowledgement that, in the course of everyday experience, objects do in fact strike us as existing in themselves; that things do appear to us as something more than what is given at the moment, as something that has an identity that subsists over and through time. In this case, that which is objectively known cannot be wholly reducible to the way it appears to me at the moment in this particular situation. It must exist in-itself, independently of its relation to the subject and its situated experiences. Since all appearance rests upon subject-relative manners of givenness, Husserl comes to realise that the latter must somehow serve as that which enables us to grasp the objective, transcendent existence of things.<sup>6</sup>

In his study of this matter, what Husserl ultimately finds is that a correspondence or correlation, whose character depends on the kind of object in question, exists between objective things and their originary subjective manners of givenness. As correlates, the two sides of this relation are ‘inseparable’ from one another, such that we cannot have one without the other.<sup>7</sup> Thus, for Husserl, the ‘object *in the How of its modes of givenness* [i.e. appearance]’ always necessarily corresponds to the actualized experiences and knowledge through which an object appears to the subject in its originarity.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, Husserl regards this correlation between objective thing and its subjective manners of givenness as an *a priori* (universal and necessary) law of consciousness,

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<sup>6</sup> Klaus Held ‘Husserl’s Phenomenology of the Life-World’, in *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Donn Welton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 34.

<sup>7</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 307, 314.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 221, 316.

which, as such, can be grasped independently of experience. For Husserl, then, as Held notes, the objects in their modes of appearance, together with their accompanying manners of givenness, simply are ‘the “phenomena”, the “appearances”, that “phenomenology” deals with, and from which it obtained its name. In the Husserlian sense, phenomena are nothing other than the existing things which are “in themselves” in the world, but only in such a way that they show themselves in their situatedness and as subjectively “for-me”’.<sup>9</sup>

The discovery of this universal *a priori* represents Husserl’s major breakthrough. As Husserl later reflects and points out in a footnote found in the *Crisis*, ‘the first breakthrough of this universal *a priori* correlation between experienced object and its manners of givenness (which occurred during work on my *Logical Investigations* around 1898) affected me so deeply that my whole subsequent life-work has been dominated by the task of systematically elaborating on this *a priori* of correlation’.<sup>10</sup> The *a priori* correlation between types of objects and their subject-relative manners of given-

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<sup>9</sup> Held, ‘Husserl’s Phenomenological Method’, in *The New Husserl*, ed. by Welton, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. by David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 166, footnote. Husserl further reflects on the central importance of this discovery for his phenomenology in the following passage: ‘[t]he fact naively taken for granted, that we see each thing and the world in general as they appear to us, concealed, as we recognize, a great horizon of remarkable truths which never entered, in their uniqueness and in their systematic connectedness, into the purview of philosophy. The correlation of the world (the world of which we always speak) and subjective manners of givenness never aroused in philosophy a philosophical awe (that is, before the first breakthrough of “transcendental phenomenology” in the *Logical Investigations*), even though it was resoundingly present in pre-Socratic philosophy and sophistry—although here only as a motive for skeptical argumentation. This correlation never aroused its own philosophical interest that might have made it the topic of an appropriate scientific attitude. We remained trapped in what was taken for granted, that is, that each thing appears differently for each person.’ *Ibid.*, p. 165. Here, however, Husserl is being anachronistic in his interpretation of his earlier breakthrough to ‘transcendental phenomenology’ in the *Logical Investigations* (1900-01), as this is not the case – Husserl dates his ‘conversion’ to transcendental idealism around 1907-1908. The breakthrough of the *Logical Investigations* was to ‘essences’. The distinction he made there was between ‘*eidōs*’ and fact (or factual existences), e.g., colour is not a particular colour (ed thing existing) but a universal object given to a corresponding act of eidetic ideation or eidetic abstraction or via eidetic reduction. This ‘essence’ (colour as a general object) ‘founds’ the empirical basis of the any *a priori* judgement about it, such as, ‘colour implies extension’, i.e. in this judgment what is ‘grasped’ is the ‘essence’ of colour, and not a factual judgement about existing colours, but this judgment is valid for all possibly and actually existing factual colours. It is much later when Husserl distinguishes mundane consciousness and transcendental consciousness, and this is why he was unhappy with his re-issues of his *Logical Investigations* as they had contained the presupposition of the natural attitude, without challenging it, as his later position in the transcendental reduction radically does.

ness is ultimately understood by Husserl as nothing other than the intentionality of consciousness.<sup>11</sup> It is the intentional nature of consciousness that enables us to access the objective, transcendent existence of things and to attain true knowledge of them.

From relatively early on, then, Husserl understood intentional consciousness as that which provides the subject with a genuine access to things as they are in themselves. His ensuing work over the years can be seen as an ever-renewed attempt to clarify and refine our understanding of how intentional accomplishments make objective knowledge possible. In order to begin to understand Husserl's account of this matter, and how it shapes his view of how the phenomenologist needs to proceed in the attempt to attain a true knowledge of things, it is of importance to give an account of some of the fundamental features in his treatment of intentionality.

As a universal *a priori* structure of our consciousness, intentionality is not seen by Husserl as one attribute of consciousness amongst others, but as its defining structure, which makes it what it is. As such, intentionality determines all of our different act-experiences (i.e. perception, feeling, judgement, wishing, fearing, etc). By virtue of its intentional structure, the acts of consciousness are always directed toward something. As directional, consciousness is never enclosed within itself, but is always 'consciousness of something'.<sup>12</sup> Thus, consciousness, in all of its acts, is always concerned with something. Whenever one loves, one loves something; when one dreams, one dreams of something; when one perceives, one perceives something.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Husserl develops his account of intentionality from that of Franz Brentano. See Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume II*, trans. by J. N. Findlay (London, Routledge, 1970), pp. 552-523. Before Husserl has encountered this theme of the intentionality of consciousness in Brentano's thinking, this concept, originally deployed in Scholastic philosophy, had undergone extensive revision by Brentano in his novel idea of a descriptive psychology.

<sup>12</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 73.

<sup>13</sup> These are 'objects' of *the activities of consciousness itself*, nonetheless, and thus this is not a return to some form of pre-Kantian naive realism.

Husserl maintains that the basic structure of intentionality consists in three elements: intentional act, content and object. In brief, the intentional act is the specific kind of mental event — i.e. perceiving, imagining, remembering, etc — while the object is the transcendent thing or state of affairs to which the act refers.<sup>14</sup> The content of an intentional act, meanwhile, is the way in which the subject thinks about or posits the intended object.<sup>15</sup>

On account of this structure, consciousness can relate to something in two basic ways: by intending something (as content) in a signitive act, or by intending something (as object) in an originally presentive intuition.<sup>16</sup> Thus Husserl distinguishes unfulfilled or empty intending acts and fulfilled intentions, or between ‘adequate’ and ‘inadequate perception’ or ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic thinking’.<sup>17</sup> For example, reading a description of an object in a book would be an empty intending act of intentional consciousness, whereas when one recognizes what is intended in the description through the signifying act (either through an actual act of sensory perception or imaginary act of perception), this would be a fulfilled act of intention.<sup>18</sup> Here, the sign (linguistic description) drops out as we experience intuitive fulfillment of ‘the object as intended itself’.<sup>19</sup> Such a transition occurs in intentional consciousness itself. It is a modification of our actual intentional consciousness. Thus this transition can be seen and is verifiable from within a descriptive-phenomenological analysis of these experiences themselves. Here, adequate perception within our intentional consciousness is possible, within limits. The

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<sup>14</sup> Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume II*, pp. 79-81.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81-85.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 231-232.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 226-227.

former inadequate, signifying way of relating to something, nonetheless, is regarded by Husserl as essential to consciousness in that it always occurs, whereas the latter relation of intuitively fulfilled intentions is only achieved in certain cases. As intentional, consciousness always intends or means something — i.e. it always relates to something as content. Consciousness is always directed toward something through one of its meanings.<sup>20</sup> When we relate to things in this manner, ‘what is given to us is not the object in its actual presence but the object as something that is only meant’.<sup>21</sup> In relating to an object in a signitive act, then, we relate to an object in an empty, vague or otherwise unfounded manner. That is to say, we think about an object or construe it as existing in this or that way, without it actually having been presented to us.<sup>22</sup>

Our account of how consciousness intends something (as content) in signitive acts could well give the impression that, in so doing, the subject merely relates to an inner mental image of the object in question. However, Brian Elliot remarks that it is of importance to remember that

to have content is not for Husserl to find an image of something literally present within the mind, it is rather for the act to refer to something quite other than itself and to the possibility that the referent be given in direct intuition. Accordingly, the opposition of content and object is not a distinction implying two distinct ontological regions, the psychologically immanent and the objectively transcendent. Instead, the having of content in intentional consciousness is at once having the object *in its (intuitive) absence*.<sup>23</sup>

This difference between content and object, then, is not a difference between two distinct ontological regions, that is, between two different types of objects or two existing objects — but, as Husserl observes in the *Logical Investigations*, between different

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>22</sup> Similar to Kant, Husserl maintains that concepts without intuitions are empty. See Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 193-194.

<sup>23</sup> Elliott, pp. 21-22.

modes of givenness.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the very same object can be given signitively (as content) or intuitively (as fulfilled intended object). What we have, then, is one world and one object as experienced in our intentional consciousness, only given in different ways.

Because of this, our signitive acts must be seen as ‘the initial phase of the basic movement of consciousness outward, towards the immediate presence of the object intended’.<sup>25</sup> It is because our signitive acts always already refer to and depend upon objective things that consciousness harbours the possibility of actually attaining a genuine closeness to things, that is to say, of relating to the presence of things themselves. It is thus through the emptiness of signitive acts that possibility or potentiality comes into the life of consciousness.

In relating to something in a signitive act, then, consciousness always relates to the possibility that its intended object might present itself in its originarity. Husserl maintains that this imbues conscious life with a knowledge of its ability to access the originary givenness of things, and with a certain desire to bring this about. Consequently, our conscious life is not a static relation to things, but a dynamic movement, one that is charged with a tendency towards the presence of things themselves. For Husserl, ‘[i]ntentionality is movement in the sense of a striving (*Streben*) towards increased determination with its intentional object.’<sup>26</sup>

This is what consciousness finds in relating to things in the mode of fulfilled and unfulfilled intuition. By relating to things in this way, the object that was previously intended in a vague or unfounded manner is presented to us in a clear and immediate way. When an object is given intuitively, ‘the object is presented in its ‘full “bodily”’

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<sup>24</sup> Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume II*, pp. 242-246.

<sup>25</sup> Elliott, pp. 21-22.

<sup>26</sup> Nicolas de Warren, *Husserl and the Promise of Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 285. It is, nevertheless, an increased determination with *its* intentional (intended) object.

presence””.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, while signitive acts are ‘empty’ acts, intuitive acts are ‘presentive’ in character’, where ‘presenting’ is distinct from mere representation (*Stellvertretung*) by parts, images or signs, as in memory or imagination.<sup>28</sup> For example, as Philipp Berghofer explains, “[w]hen I think [...] there is a book on my desk and its color is red”, this act of thinking is a signitive act. When I look at my desk and see that there is a red book on it, this act of seeing is an intuitive act, that is, an intuition’.<sup>29</sup> By relating to an object in an originally presentive intuition, then, the subject achieves a genuine closeness to things; the object is placed before us as it really is in itself, in its objective, transcendent existence.<sup>30</sup>

## 1.2 THE CONCEPT OF EVIDENCE

When a previously empty or unfounded intentional aim is presented with its intended object in a corresponding act of intuition, our previously unfounded aim is fulfilled and is said to have evidence.<sup>31</sup> In this sense, evidence is an intentional achievement. It is a type of experience in which we are brought close to the presence of things in a corre-

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<sup>27</sup> Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume II*, p. 93. Husserl does stress that this is analogy — *sozusagen* — with the givenness of perception. Colour, for example, is given, *as if* to say, in its bodily reality, in the flesh, just as colours are given to immediate sense perception. What Husserl is not saying is that colour, as a general object, is bodily or made of flesh.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 232-233. On account of the intentional nature of consciousness, intuition cannot be understood in its more traditional guise, as a kind of inner spiritual voice.

<sup>29</sup> Philipp Berghofer, ‘On the Nature and Systematic Role of Evidence: Husserl as a Proponent of Mentalist Evidentialism’, *European Journal of Philosophy* 27 (2019), 98-117, p. 101.

<sup>30</sup> Truth arises here as the adequation between an intentional act and its object, as the fulfilment of an intentional act in a corresponding act of intuition. This is a descriptive-psychological epistemological criterion, nonetheless, and not a return to any pre-Kantian realism of ‘adequation’ between mind and thing (*adaequatio intellectus et rei*, or *ad rem*) that resides ‘outside’ of our actual intentional consciousness. Because our intentional acts refer to and depend upon the objects toward which they are directed in their corresponding manners of givenness, truth is not merely determined by us in a one-sided manner, but also by the objects that serve as the guiding thread of our analysis of *our intentional consciousness*.

<sup>31</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 329-331.



sponding act of intuition. Inasmuch as consciousness consists in a movement that strives towards an increased determination of its intentional object, evidence can be seen as the telos of conscious life.

On the basis of this, Husserl comes to view evidence not only as the paradigm for philosophical knowledge, but as the foundation of his epistemology, and of all rationality. As he writes, ‘all genuine, and, in particular, all scientific knowledge, rests on evidence: as far as such evidence extends, the concept of knowledge extends also’.<sup>32</sup> Evidence is seen by Husserl as a necessary condition for knowledge. We say necessary rather than necessary and sufficient (NAS) condition because, as we will see presently, Husserl ultimately finds that evidence is not necessarily infallible, as he distinguishes apodictic and factual assertoric evidence.

While evidence is not a NAS condition for knowledge, as Berghofer argues, there is ample evidence in Husserl’s work to suppose that he does view it as a NAS condition for justification.<sup>33</sup> As Husserl writes, ‘[i]mmmediate "seeing," not merely sensuous, experiential seeing, but seeing in the universal sense as an originally presentive consciousness of any kind whatever, is the ultimate legitimizing source of all rational assertions.’<sup>34</sup> As he further notes in his principle of all principles: ‘[n]o conceivable theory can make us err with respect to the principle of all principles: that *every originally presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originally* (so to speak [*sozusagen*], in its “personal” actuality) *offered to us in "intuition" is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which*

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<sup>32</sup> Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume I*, trans. by J. N. Findlay (London, Routledge, 1970), p. 18.

<sup>33</sup> Berghofer, ‘On the nature and systematic role of evidence’, pp. 100-104.

<sup>34</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 36.

*it is presented there.*<sup>35</sup> These passages provide us with some clear indication that intuitive fulfilment (i.e. evidence), within the limits in which it presents its objects (as apodictic or assertoric), serves as a NAS condition for justification. In that case, if p is given to us, then we are justified in believing that p'.<sup>36</sup>

This account of evidence, and the ensuing principle of all principles, are pivotal in shaping Husserl's understanding of how phenomenology must proceed in its study of phenomena. Elsewhere, Husserl describes this principle as 'the most universal principle of all methods, the principle of the original right of all data'.<sup>37</sup> In brief, this principle dictates that phenomenologists are not permitted to interpret phenomena in advance but to find the legitimating evidences within the experiences of consciousness itself. To attain unprejudiced knowledge of the things themselves, phenomenology must proceed by refraining from making any assumptions in advance about experience.<sup>38</sup> The phenomenologist must strive to refrain from making presumptions as to what ought to count as an experience. Instead, as Erazim Kohak notes, phenomenology must accept 'as its primordial starting point whatever gives itself in experience, as it gives itself, *and only as such*'.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 44. Along these lines, Husserl will state in a later work that 'if thought, insofar as it is an activity of judgment, really leads to its goal — *to knowledge* (i.e., if the judgments are to be *self-evident* judgments) — then [...] [o]n their part, these objects must also be so pre-given that their givenness of itself makes knowledge, i.e., self-evident judgment, possible. They must themselves be self-evident, must be given as themselves. To speak of self-evidence, of self-evident givenness, then, here signifies nothing other than *self-givenness*, the way in which an object in its givenness can be characterized relative to consciousness as "itself-there", "there in the flesh", in contrast to its mere presentification [*Vergegenwärtigung*], the empty, merely indicative idea of it'. Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, trans. by James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks (London: Routledge, 1973), p. 19.

<sup>36</sup> Berghofer, 'On the nature and systematic role of evidence', p. 100.

<sup>37</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 48.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>39</sup> Erazim Kohak, *Idea and Experience* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978), p. 41.

In keeping with this conception of evidence as a matter of experience, Husserl's account of what counts as evidence (i.e. ordinary givenness) is fairly wide-ranging. Evidence comes in various degrees of adequacy and it does not have a single nature.<sup>40</sup> Just as there are different experiences, with varying degrees of clarity, so too there are different evidences — i.e. different ways of intuiting things — with varying levels of clarity.<sup>41</sup>

Sensible intuition, for one, presents us with the concrete particulars of experience. For instance, when we make the judgement “[t]he book is lying on the table” or “[t]he table is green”, these expressions contain ‘elements which can be easily fulfilled in sense perception, for example, the book, the table, and the green colour’.<sup>42</sup> That being said, while sensible intuition presents us with the book, the table, and the green colour, it does not seem sufficient to present us with ‘the “lying on the table”, or the

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<sup>40</sup> Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume II*, pp. 263-264. Husserl identifies two forms of perfect evidence, that of adequate and apodictic evidence. Adequate evidence is the kind of evidence the subject has when there are no ‘unfulfilled components’, no ‘expectant’ or ‘attendant meanings’, and when all of these expectant and attendant meanings have been fulfilled in actual experience’. Apodictic evidence consists in the absolute indomitability of the given state of affairs, in the ‘absolute unimaginability (inconceivability) of their non-being, and thus excluding in advance every doubt as “objectless”, empty’. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, pp. 15-16. Up until the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl maintains that adequate and apodictic evidence as necessarily conjoined. In this later work, though, he states that apodictic evidences can occur in inadequate evidences. As he writes, ‘[p]erhaps this remark was made precisely with the case of transcendental self-experience in mind. In such experience the ego is accessible to himself originaliter. But at any particular time this experience offers only a core that is experienced “with strict adequacy”, namely the ego's living present (which the grammatical sense of the sentence, *ego cogito*, expresses); while, beyond that, only an indeterminately general presumptive horizon extends, comprising what is strictly non-experienced but necessarily also-meant. To it belongs not only the ego's past, most of which is completely obscure, but also his transcendental abilities and his habitual peculiarities at the time.’ Ibid., pp. 22-23. In this case, while Husserl views adequate evidence as an unobtainable ideal, it may be possible to obtain apodictic evidence in the case of our own existence in the reflective, immanent perception of a current (conscious) experience (*Sein als Erlebnis*).

<sup>41</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, trans. by Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969) pp. 56–67. Husserl maintains that there is both pre-predicative (i.e. implicit, unthematized) and predicative evidence, with the latter based on the former. As Dagfinn Føllesdal notes, pre-predicative evidence consists in intuitive fulfilment ‘concerning matters that we have never thought about, far less explicitly judged about’. An example would be ‘the evidence we have that there is a floor in this room, evidence which we received as soon as we opened the door and stepped in’. From 1917 onwards, Husserl begins to engage in a study of pre-predicative evidence in the realms of practical activity and feeling, though these domains do not receive nearly as much attention as cognitive activities such as perception, and they remain somewhat underdeveloped in his work. Føllesdal, ‘Husserl on Evidence and Justification’, in *Edmund Husserl and the Phenomenological Tradition*, ed. by Sokolowski, p. 111.

<sup>42</sup> Dieter Lohmar, ‘Husserl's Concept of Categorial Intuition’, in *One Hundred Years of Phenomenology*, ed. by Dan Zahavi and Frederik Stjernfelt (Dordrecht: Kluwer), p. 125.

“being green” of the book.<sup>43</sup> Sensory perception does not seem capable of presenting us with predicative being, that is to say, with complex states of affairs and relations.<sup>44</sup> As Dieter Lohmar writes,

[f]or those intentions directed at ‘states of affairs’ (*Sachverhalte*), it seems impossible that they could be fulfilled by sense perception alone. In sense perception I can see the ‘green,’ but I cannot see the ‘being green’ in the same way. We might generalise this and claim that predicative being is not something perceivable. But not being fulfillable in sensibility alone does not include only predicative being but all categorial Forms, i.e., the forms ‘one’, ‘and’, ‘all’, ‘if’, ‘then’, ‘or’, ‘all’, ‘no’, ‘not’, and so on.<sup>45</sup>

Such categorial objects and forms of cognition, nonetheless, are no more mysteriously given to our intuitive experiences than the evident sense judgment of particulars.

In order to address the issue as to how it is that we relate to and experience more complex states of affairs, relations, and universal categories, Husserl thus extends intuition to include a categorial or super-sensible form.<sup>46</sup> In his view, the subject does not only intuit particular empirical objects, but also abstract conceptual objects. That is to say, consciousness does not only intuit sensory givens or particular things, but more complex ‘states of affairs’, universals and other categorial objects.<sup>47</sup> For Husserl, such categorial or synthetic intuition involves acts of cognitive identification and differentiation. As he points out in the *Logical Investigations*, it allows us to grasp relations such

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume II*, pp. 278-280. While Husserl states that categories are given as ‘an analogue of common sensuous intuition’, intuition here should not be understood as a type of pure, immediate seeing, but as a cognitive achievement, as the manifestation of a state of affairs through the use of our understanding. Ibid., 280.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

as “‘A is to the right of B’, ‘A is larger, brighter, louder than B, etc’”.<sup>48</sup> Categorial intuition thus enables us to grasp something as having to do with something else.<sup>49</sup> For example, it enables us to see the book as blue, or as lying on the bench, and so on.

On Husserl’s account, the sensible intuition of a singular object already contains such universal categories, albeit on an implicit level. Bearing this in mind, Elliott notes that ‘there can be no suggestion of two separate worlds, one composed of concrete singularities the other of abstract generalities. Instead, the distinction turns on different modes of givenness of one and the same basic reality’.<sup>50</sup> Because of this, such categorial acts do not in any way alter or falsify the object, but actually reveal it as it is in itself.<sup>51</sup> These categorial intuitions underpin all our categorial acts of logical reasoning (e.g. all s is p, some s is p, some s is not p). Therefore, the ‘phenomenological elucidation of experience’, or perhaps more accurately speaking, of the experiences of a valid logical consciousness as such that Husserl undertakes in the second volume of his *Logical Investigations*, simply proceeds as ‘a movement from the implicit to the explicit manifestation of structure’, as a movement ‘from the singular to the universal’.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to categorial intuition, Husserl maintains that we also have an intuition of essence or eidos (i.e. eidetic intuition) that is trans-categorial.<sup>53</sup> That is to say, given the *a priori* of correlation, the subject is able to achieve an insight into the *a pri-*

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<sup>48</sup> Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume II*, pp. 288. For more on Husserl’s account of categorial intuition, see Robert Sokolowski, ‘Moral Thinking’, in *Edmund Husserl and the Phenomenological Tradition: Essays in Phenomenology*, ed. by Robert Sokolowski (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), p. 235.

<sup>49</sup> Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume II*, pp. 155-156, 280-281.

<sup>50</sup> Elliott, p. 26.

<sup>51</sup> Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume II*, p. 282.

<sup>52</sup> Elliott, p. 26.

<sup>53</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 11-13; Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, pp. 26-28.

*ori* structures or laws that determine various types of objectivities or regions of being, and the intentional acts that are related to them.<sup>54</sup> As the condition for the appearance of a particular object as this or that, Husserl maintains that this ‘seeing of essences’ provides the most basic knowledge of what is.<sup>55</sup>

At its heart, then, Husserl contends that phenomenology, in its search for true and lasting knowledge, is not concerned with facts.<sup>56</sup> It is not concerned with particular individuals and the particular things toward which they are directed. Rather, it is concerned with the essential universal structures or laws (i.e. essences) of intentional acts and their objectivities, of which concrete things are but particular instantiations (i.e. essential knowledge).<sup>57</sup> Thus in an earlier reference and defence of his theory of eidetic ideation, or eidetic abstraction as he calls it in his *Logical Investigations*, in *Ideas I*, Section §75 (‘Phenomenology as a Descriptive Eidetic Doctrine of Pure Experiences’), Husserl stresses this methodological commitment in his definition of phenomenology as the way of gaining insight into such higher objects of knowledge corresponding to their legitimating sources in eidetic intuition. In his words,

[t]he study of the stream of mental processes is, for its part, carried on in a variety of peculiarly structured reflective acts which themselves also belong in the stream of mental processes and which, in corresponding reflections at a higher level, can be made the Objects of phenomenological analyses. This is because their analysis is fundamental to a universal phenomenology and to the methodological insight quite indispensable to it (*unentberliche methodologische Einsicht*).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 9-11. By regions of being, Husserl means areas of objectivities that are determined by their *eidos*, by the outward look they offer in a corresponding originary intuition.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16. Cf. also Frederick J. Wertz, ‘The Method of Eidetic Analysis for Psychology’, in *The re-direction of psychology: Essays in honour of Amedeo P. Giorgi*, ed. by T.F. Cloonan and C. Thiboutot (Montreal: Le Cercle Interdisciplinaire de Recherches Phénoménologiques, 2010), pp. 261-278 (p. 283).

<sup>56</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 11.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9, 11, 14.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

To attain such an insight into essence, Husserl believes that the phenomenologist must engage in a process of eidetic reduction and eidetic variation.<sup>59</sup> With the eidetic reduction, the subject shifts from its natural reflective focus on contingent, factual conscious processes and particular, material objects of sense judgement to a reflection on the essential (i.e. necessary and universal) laws that determine their construction.<sup>60</sup> We can know, for instance, certain colours of leaves on a tree, but when we make the universal *a priori* judgement that ‘colour’, no matter what particular colour or shade of colour it is, ‘is extended’, Husserl argues that we are inspecting what is necessarily true of colour itself and making a judgement about colour as a universal object of experience, and not just about particular sense judgements of colours. We cannot know colours without colours *being* extended. For Husserl, then, all eidetic laws are eidetic-*ontological* laws. They express the ‘inability-to-be-otherwise’ for the experienced or judged object, and not the factual, empirical, psychological ‘incapacity-to-represent-things-otherwise.’<sup>61</sup> In such eidetic judgements, therefore, we have gained *more knowledge* about our experience of colour itself than of colours as colours (in categorical intuitions), when we gain intuitive insight into the essence of colour as extension. This direct and immediate trans-categorical knowledge of colour itself, of what Husserl calls the ‘*eidōs*’ or ‘essence’ of the judgement, nonetheless, is given to our experiences. Thus ‘intuiting essences’, Husserl writes in his famous 1910–11 *Logos* essay ‘Philosophy as Rigorous Science’, ‘conceals no more difficulties or “mystical” secrets than does perception. When we bring “colour” to full intuitive clarity, to givenness for ourselves, then the datum is an

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. xx, 7-8; Edmund Husserl, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology: From the Lectures, Winter Semester, 1910-1911*, trans. by Ingo Farin and James G. Hart (Dordrecht, Springer, 2006), p. 17.

<sup>60</sup> Necessity here means that no instance of intentional life can elude these laws, while universality means that they encompass all possible cases. It should be noted that the eidetic reduction itself involves a kind of epoche, a suspension of the assumption of factual existence: the essential structures of situations exist regardless of whether or not there are certain factual situations.

<sup>61</sup> Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume 1*, pp. 445–446.

“essence” [...]. As far as intuition — i.e., having an intuitive consciousness — extends, so far extends the possibility of a corresponding “ideation” (as I called it in *Logische Untersuchungen*), or “seeing essence” (*Wesensschau*).<sup>62</sup>

According to Husserl, eidetic insight is achieved through a process of eidetic variation. When engaging in this process, the subject begins with the actual experience of a fact and then proceeds to modify it in her free phantasy; she projects it into as many imaginative contexts as possible, varying its circumstances and even pushing it into the impossible.<sup>63</sup> In so doing, the individual is able to see which of its qualities can withstand these variations, and thereby attains knowledge of what is truly essential to the thing in question.<sup>64</sup> It is of the essence of colour, for example, to be extended. In other words, we cannot think away extension from the being of colour itself in and for any colour (coloured thing). It thus follows that for Husserl his account of the ‘intuition of an essence’ is bound up with his sustained reflections on ‘dependent and non-dependent contents’ of judgement that concerned him in the *Logical Investigations*. As Theodore de Boer succinctly remarks, ‘when a certain content is subjected to variation in fantasy, we discover that there are limits to the variation. To go beyond such a limit is to rob the object of one of its essential characteristics. This invariable limit is therefore part of the essence. The aspects that can be altered in fantasy are non-essential or contingent’.<sup>65</sup> When we attempt to ‘think away’ or ‘annihilate’ those contents ‘in thought’ that either can or cannot be ‘eliminated’, what we are doing, then, is ‘trying to discover the inde-

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<sup>62</sup> Husserl, ‘Philosophy as Rigorous Science’, in Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, trans. by Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 71–147 (pp. 110–111).

<sup>63</sup> Since the subject ‘has incomparably more freedom’ to reshape things in phantasy, Husserl states that ‘the freedom of eidetic research [...] necessarily demands operating in phantasy’. Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 159.

<sup>64</sup> Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, pp. 340–342, 347–348; Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 11.

<sup>65</sup> Theodore de Boer, *The Development of Husserl’s Thought*, trans. by Theodore Plantinga (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1978), p. 343.



pendence or non-independence of something'.<sup>66</sup> For Husserl, therefore, 'eidetic ideation', 'eidetic variation', 'eidetic abstraction', and 'eidetic reduction' all mean the same; they are all part of the same process of 'seeing the things themselves', that is, 'essences'. And this form of 'seeing', as de Boer concludes, is 'not an odd form of imagination, but a procedure that is rigorously scientific, according to Husserl'.<sup>67</sup> It takes, nonetheless, intellectual effort (*er-schauen*).

### 1.3 THE FIRST MOMENT OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION: THE EPOCHE

What interests Husserl as a phenomenologist is obtaining a radically unbiased and intuitively justifiable knowledge of whatever is. Because of this, he ultimately comes to find that phenomenology cannot merely seek knowledge of this or that region of being, but must endeavour to achieve unbiased knowledge of the whole of everything that is, what Husserl refers to as the world.<sup>68</sup> This is not a new goal for philosophy. Since its very beginning, philosophy has sought an insight into the whole of existence, into the conditions that are common to all beings.<sup>69</sup> To attain a radically unbiased knowledge,

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 344.

<sup>68</sup> The world is understood by Husserl as a universal horizon, i.e. a horizon that encompasses the horizons of all of my possible experiences. In *Ideas I* the world is simply 'the sum-total of objects of possible experience and experiential cognition, of objects that, on the basis of actual experiences, are cognizable in correct theoretical thinking'. Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 6. This was not an object of enquiry in the *Logical Investigations*, rather in that study Husserl, for the purposes of enquiry, sectioned off the experiences of a normatively valid logical consciousness as such, setting aside the natural world and the world of things about us. This latter 'fact world', as he calls it in *Ideas I*, is simply not a concern of the logician *qua* logician. Husserl, in other words, evades this issue in the *Logical Investigations*, that is to say, presupposes its validity. This presupposition, what Husserl later calls 'the [hypo]thesis of the natural attitude', becomes radically called into question through the transcendental reduction in *Ideas I*.

<sup>69</sup> As Aristotle notes in his *Metaphysics*, philosophy seeks to determine both what is common to beings as such — i.e. the conditions that apply to beings in general — and the nature of the absolute foundation or underlying unity — i.e. the supreme being — of beings as a whole. See Aristotle, 'Metaphysics', in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Richard McKeon (New York: Modern Library, 2001), pp. 691-692, 981b25-982a3.

Husserl's phenomenology must plumb these depths; it must determine whether and how the subject is able to obtain an unprejudiced insight into its existence as a whole (i.e. world-knowledge). While the eidetic reduction can be used 'to light the way from partial regions of the world (i.e., specific regions of being and their related types of acts) to their eidetic determinations, this insight into essence as such is still not a general knowledge of the world in the sense of a whole'.<sup>70</sup> Until the philosopher obtains unbiased knowledge of the world as a whole, and instead finds her knowledge restricted to individual sections, there will always remain the risk that there are unquestioned biases and assumptions *about consciousness itself* lingering somewhere in these still unknown regions of being.<sup>71</sup> To achieve this, Husserl insists that we need to perform a transcendental-phenomenological reduction.<sup>72</sup> It is this famous and celebrated reduction of the natural attitude to the transcendental-phenomenological attitude that Husserl believes will finally allow phenomenology to become an unbiased method that both unlocks and attains an unbiased knowledge of the world (even if few, if any of Husserl's so-called followers accepted this movement in his thought or in phenomenology).

According to Husserl, such a reduction is necessary because, in the subject's natural attitude towards the world, both the world *and consciousness* remain unthematic. In what Husserl calls 'the general thesis' of 'the natural attitude' (*natürliche Einstellung*), things are perceived as 'simply there' (*vorhanden*), whether attention is directed towards them or not.<sup>73</sup> In this way, the subject covers over and largely forgets the origin of the meaningfulness of the world in the correlational *a priori* of that being's own in-

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<sup>70</sup> Held, 'Husserl's Phenomenological Method', in *The New Husserl*, ed. Welton, p. 17.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 113.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 56.

tentional consciousness.<sup>74</sup> In its normal, everyday acts (i.e. judgments, perceptions, etc.), the subject largely forgets that the world is always an experienced world, and so, is always ‘relative to the experiencing subject’.<sup>75</sup> In ‘the general thesis of the natural attitude’, then, the subject is guided by the unquestioned assumption that the world of things enjoys an absolute, mind-independent existence and meaning (*Sinn*).

As a result, the natural attitude is characterised by a certain naiveté, that is, by a tendency to take the existence of the world for granted. As James Dodd comments, our natural experience is guided by a ‘naive acceptance that the world “is”, that even the ever-present distance between the world and myself simply “is”’.<sup>76</sup> By the same token, the natural attitude is ‘naive with respect to the significance of its own being’, as a way of realising the meaningfulness of the world as a whole.<sup>77</sup> The natural attitude does not understand itself as such, as a particular ‘realisation of the whole that it “is”’.<sup>78</sup>

None of this is to say that the natural attitude is altogether oblivious of the fact that objects appear to us in subject-relative manners of givenness, or that it is dealing with a world that challenges and resists its effort with a certain obscurity or otherness.<sup>79</sup> The natural attitude involves an implicit awareness of these basic features of our lived experience, yet they remain in the background as unthematic. The natural attitude does not preclude the subject from posing questions about its opinions or those of others, or

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<sup>74</sup> For Husserl’s account of the personal attitude, which occurs within the natural attitude, see his *Ideas I*, pp. 240, 252.

<sup>75</sup> Sebastian Luft, ‘Husserl’s Theory of the Phenomenological Reduction: Between Life-World and Cartesianism’, *Research in Phenomenology* 34, no. 1 (2004), 198-234 (p. 204). Husserl views this unquestioned belief in the world as the most basic presupposition of knowledge.

<sup>76</sup> James Dodd, ‘Attitude - Facticity - Philosophy’, in *Alterity and Facticity: New Perspectives on Husserl*, ed. by Natalie Depraz and Dan Zahavi (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988), p. 68.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

from engaging in debate and attempting to justify its naively-held beliefs precisely because the pre-predicative positing of the existence of the world is assumed in the ‘thesis of the natural attitude’. From this position, though, the subject does not feel any need to question the ultimate foundation of the meaningfulness of its having ideas, beliefs and justifications. From within the thesis of the natural attitude the world is irrefragable. Naive life does not feel any pressing need to ‘satisfy a rigorous, painstaking demand for “truth”’.<sup>80</sup>

Briefly stated, then, everyday experience does not tend to be guided by strictly theoretical interests. As John Scanlon notes, the natural attitude ‘presents the world, not as it would exist for a purely disinterested spectator, but as it does exist for an interested, involved participant. Hence, it presents objects, events and situations as meaningful, as value-laden, and as having practical significance’.<sup>81</sup> The way of life proper to the natural attitude is thus one in which the individual pursues her practical interests without subjecting them to any fundamental questions. In the natural attitude, the subject instead finds herself enamoured with the immediacy and obviousness of the world, by the familiarity of this world that is always already there, and which so often arouses her interests and satisfies her desires.<sup>82</sup>

If we are to obtain true (i.e. unprejudiced, objective) knowledge of the world as a whole, the subject will need to somehow suspend the natural attitude’s dogmatic belief

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>81</sup> John Scanlon, ‘Husserl’s *Ideas* and the Natural Concept of the World’, in *Edmund Husserl and the Phenomenological Tradition*, ed. by Robert Sokolowski (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press), p. 230.

<sup>82</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 53.

in its absolute existence.<sup>83</sup> Given that this attitude is as basic as it is to our everyday lives — ‘something that lasts continuously throughout the whole duration of [...] natural waking life’, as Husserl states<sup>84</sup> — one might wonder whether we can free ourselves of it enough in order to reflect on it in the unbiased way that Husserl’s rigorous science requires. How could such a radical transformation possibly come about? Husserl makes it clear that the shift to the phenomenological (or theoretical) attitude requires a ‘specific motivation’.<sup>85</sup> That being said, if the natural attitude is not explicitly aware of itself as such, and the individual who exists in such a way is so thoroughly satisfied with the comforting rhythms and routines of everyday life, then what motivation would there be to make a shift toward the philosophical attitude?<sup>86</sup> From within the parameters of the natural attitude, so construed, escape seems impossible. As Eugen Fink puts this, the phenomenological reduction seems to ‘presuppose itself’.<sup>87</sup> That is to say, it would not be possible for the subject to suspend all of her prejudices and assumptions unless the natural attitude did not already have an understanding that its belief in the absolute existence of the world is something of a prejudice. The motivation to undertake the shift to the philosophical attitude must therefore be situated somewhere within the natural attitude.

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<sup>83</sup> As Husserl explains in *Ideas I*, the phenomenologist needs to ‘set aside all previous habits of thought, see through and break down the mental barriers which these habits have set along the horizons of our thinking, and in full intellectual freedom proceed to lay hold on those genuine philosophical problems still awaiting completely fresh formulation which the liberated horizons on all sides disclose to us — these are hard demands. Yet nothing less is required’. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>85</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Erste Philosophie (1923/24): Theorie der phänomenologischen Reduktion*, ed. by Rudolf Boehm (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956), p. 98.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97-99.

<sup>87</sup> Eugen Fink, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, trans. by Ronald Bruzina (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 36.

Indeed, Husserl ultimately finds the motivation for this shift within the history of ideas, more specifically, in the idea of philosophy as a rigorous science and first philosophy.<sup>88</sup> By engaging in an eidetic and phenomenological analysis of the idea-contents and the underlying interrelations between the paradigmatic moments in the history of philosophy, Husserl eventually comes to find that this history is based upon the idea of achieving perfect self-justification (truth, total self-disclosure) for all of its positions (i.e. by grasping the essence of things in evidence).<sup>89</sup> In his eyes, it is this idea, which is said to be determined in advance by God as the ultimate logos or rational principle,<sup>90</sup> which renders consciousness a rational infinite process of self-constitution, and which motivates the subject's consciousness, in its freedom,<sup>91</sup> to suspend its naive world-belief by enacting the epoche, by holding itself back from naively positing the world as existing in various ways.<sup>92</sup>

As Husserl states, in suspending our dogmatic belief in the absolute (independent) existence of the world,

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<sup>88</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>89</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Erste Philosophie II (1923/24): Theorie der phänomenologischen Reduktion*, ed. by Rudolf Boehm (Den Haag, Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), p. 29. In adopting this eidetic and phenomenological stance toward the study of history, Husserl's approach differs from that of empiricism — for which history is a collection of objective facts -- and idealism — for which history is the progression of world-spirit. In analysing these historical presuppositions, not as prior philosophical systems, but as layers of sense that are sedimented within his own phenomenology, Husserl views his analysis of the history of philosophy as an 'archeology' of phenomenological matters. Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Husserl argues for this in *Ideas I*, pp. 133-134. As Husserl states later in this same work, '[t]he idea of God is a necessary limiting concept in epistemological considerations, and an indispensable index to the construction of certain limiting concepts which not even the philosophizing atheist can do without.' Ibid., p. 187, note 17. For more on this matter, see Cyril McDonnell, 'The Task and Significance of Philosophical Reflection on the Relation of the Finite to the Infinite after Kant, in Husserl, Heidegger, and Schleiermacher', in *Yearbook of the Irish Philosophical Society* (2011), 93-116 (p. 94, note 4).

<sup>91</sup> Here Husserl is bringing his version of philosophy as transcendental phenomenology in line with post-Kantian German idealism of Fichte where what characterizes human consciousness is its freedom and your freedom is your consciousness. For Husserl's discussion of this, see his *Ideas I*, p. 61. Cf. also Marcus Brainard, *Belief and its Neutralization. Husserl's System of Phenomenology in Ideas I* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

<sup>92</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 61-62. While the epoche can be applied to particular objects or regions of being, Husserl ultimately finds it necessary to universalise the epoche, such that it applies to the world as a whole.

the annulment in question is not a transmutation of positing into counter positing, of position into negation; it is also not a transmutation into uncertain presumption, deeming possible, undecidedness, into a doubt (in any sense whatever of the word): nor indeed is anything like that whiten the sphere of our free choice. *Rather it is something wholly peculiar. We do not give up the positing we effected, we do not in any respect alter our conviction* which remains in itself as it is as long as we do not introduce new judgment-motives [...]. Nevertheless, the positing undergoes a modification: while it in itself remains what it is, *we, so to speak, 'put it out of action' we 'exclude it', we 'parenthesize it'*. It is still there, like the parenthesized in the parentheses, like the excluded outside the context of inclusion [*wie das Ausgeschaltete außerhalb des Zusammenhanges der Schaltung*]. We can also say: The positing is a mental process, *but we make 'no use' of it*, and this is not understood, naturally, as implying that we are deprived of it (as it would if we said of someone who was not conscious, that he made no use of a positing); rather, in the case of this expression and all parallel expressions it is a matter of indicative designations of a definite, *specifically peculiar mode of consciousness* which is added to the original positing simpliciter.<sup>93</sup>

In carrying out the epoche, the subject does not negate or completely do away with the phenomenon of the world, but merely puts her judgment as to whether or not there is a world out of play in order to see the world purely in terms of how it appears to consciousness — i.e. in terms of how it is known.<sup>94</sup>

In doing so, as Scanlon observes,

I can deliberately adopt the stance of a 'disinterested spectator' [what Husserl calls the phenomenological or theoretical attitude]. I can assume a stance in which I am, temporarily or habitually, disinterested in those aspects of experienced objects that refer, explicitly or implicitly, to my personal value-preferences and my personal practical projects. I do so in order to focus attention exclusively upon the purely theoretical aspects of experience, those that disclose what objects are and how they are, regardless of how I feel about them or how I might be prompted to respond to them practically.<sup>95</sup>

As the above passage from Husserl suggests, in suspending the feeling and practical layers of experience, these 'disregarded strata of experience continue to function, but

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pp. 58-59. It is like an electric circuit (*Schaltung*) that is 'switched off' (*Ausgeschalten*), but still there, while switched off, a circuit-breaker.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., pp. 61-62, 113, 115.

<sup>95</sup> Scanlon, 'Husserl's *Ideas* and the Natural Concept of the World', in *Edmund Husserl and the Phenomenological Tradition*, ed. by Sokolowski, p. 230.

they are not taken into consideration as presenting data for theoretically interested observation'.<sup>96</sup>

For Husserl, then, the point of the epoche is primarily epistemological; it serves to liberate and edify the subject.<sup>97</sup> We suspend our naive belief in the absolute existence of the world in hopes of gaining access to a region that is free of personal interest and involvement in the world, and which can therefore serve as the neutral position from which we might obtain unbiased, objective knowledge as to what founds this naive belief in the world. Assuming it can be carried out, the epoche effectively enables the subject to obtain historical absoluteness, which is a necessary prerequisite for systematic absoluteness.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>97</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 84. As Scanlon notes, by 'disclosing a sphere of reflective observation not accessible within the natural attitude, the reduction points up the limits and relativity of the sense and validity of natural experience, limits not noticed by an observer who remains immersed in that attitude. By thus liberating phenomenological philosophers from those limits, the reduction also brings to light the general lesson of the fundamental significance of changes of attitudes. Thus instructed, we can discern essentially different attitudes within the overall natural attitude, each with its appropriate apperceptive categories'. Scanlon, 'Husserl's *Ideas* and the Natural Concept of the World', in *Edmund Husserl and the Phenomenological Tradition*, ed. by Sokolowski, pp. 229-230.



#### 1.4 THE SECOND MOMENT OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION: THE REDUCTION PROPER

This brings us to the second, interrelated moment of the transcendental-phenomenological reduction, namely, the reduction proper.<sup>98</sup> In this second moment, the subject is led back (i.e. reduced) to the absolute foundation of the world. In Husserl's view, this is none other than the pure ego.<sup>99</sup> When the subject suspends its naive belief in the absolute existence of the world, and begins to reflect in an unconditional manner on its acts and their structure, Husserl claims that what it discovers is 'a "pure" Ego stripped of any worldly meaning'.<sup>100</sup> What remains after the epoche 'is the *transcendental* Ego, which is not part of the world, but is that which "has" the world "opposed" to it as its universal correlate. This consciousness is the totality of the field of intentionality, as the correlate to the worldly totality given in intentional acts'.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 20-22. It is important to stress that, though we are laying out the two moments of the reduction under separate headings, the moments are not separate but are interrelated and occur together. The section in *Ideas I* that houses the reduction is called 'The Fundamental Phenomenological Consideration'. Here, Husserl selects and compares the mode of being as thing (*Sein als Ding*) given to outer perceptual-sense experience and being as (conscious) experience (*Sein as Erlebnis*) given in inner perception for phenomenological (eidetic) analysis and subjects both of these experiences to an apodictic criticism of experience. The conclusion of this analysis is well known (even if not well understood or accepted by many): whereas the mode of being as thing (and by extension the world of things) is dependent for its very existence on the facticity of the actual harmony (*Zusammenhang*) of one's intentional perceptual experiences, the mode of being as (conscious) experience is not, and so, has an absolute mode of being (= independent of things and the world). Thus one's own actual intentional consciousness could exist even if the entire world of things were annihilated (in the repeatable world-annihilation thought-experiment). My actual consciousness, then, cannot depend upon the thing (the world of things) to exist, for it (and the world of things) depend upon the hidden but now unlocked depth dimension of my actual transcendental consciousness. Thus the thesis of the natural attitude — that is, the hypothesis that in perception things are simply there (*vorhanden*), whether attention is directed towards them or not — is unveiled as precisely that, that is, as an unjustifiable phenomenological hypothesis and fictional account of the true meaning of the being of the world.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>100</sup> Luft, 'Husserl's Theory of the Phenomenological Reduction', p. 207. By this Husserl means that our consciousness cannot be compared or understood in terms of any being of a thing given to outer perceptual sense experience e.g. as an epiphenomenon of the body or brain etc, as the world, for Husserl, simply means the totality of things that are or can be given to outer sense perception.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

The reduction proper thereby reveals that the pure ego is the universal *a priori* origin of the meaningfulness of the world; that it is the pure transcendental field where the world's meaningfulness is constituted in the first place.<sup>102</sup> As Husserl writes in the *Cartesian Meditations*, 'this world, with all its Objects [...] derives its whole sense and its existential status, which it has for me, *from me as the transcendental Ego*, the Ego who comes to the fore only with the transcendental-phenomenological epoche'.<sup>103</sup> Therefore, this subjective pole of consciousness is transcendental in that it bestows meaning on conscious experience, which is to say, it allows it to hold together or make sense.

This brings about a seismic shift in the subject's understanding of its relation to both the meaning (*Sinn*) and existence of the world. In the reduction proper, the existence of the world whose validity was previously held in suspense is now revealed as dependent upon the intentional accomplishments of the pure ego. In Husserl's words,

the whole *spatiotemporal world*, which includes human being and the human Ego as subordinate single realities is, *according to its sense, a merely intentional being*, thus one has the merely secondary sense of a being *for* a consciousness. It is a being posited by consciousness in its experiences which, of essential necessity, can be determined and intuited only as something identical belonging to motivated multiplicities of appearances: *beyond that* it is nothing.<sup>104</sup>

The transcendental reduction essentially gets rid of the *interpretation of* the material world as fostered by the natural attitude as an independent entity and reveals that nature only exists as constituting itself within intentional consciousness itself. In other words, the reduction reveals that 'the world is a part of the correlational *a priori*', that it 'is the

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<sup>102</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 199.

<sup>103</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 26.

<sup>104</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 112.

whole of all intentionally appearing objects'.<sup>105</sup> As such, it enables the subject to see that the relation between consciousness and the world is one of dependence, where consciousness has an ontological priority over the world, such that the latter is relative to the former.<sup>106</sup>

As the absolute foundation of the world, Husserl claims that the pure ego enjoys an absolute, self-contained existence.<sup>107</sup> The pure ego is 'a *sui generis* entity with no necessary ontological ties to or dependence upon any other existing entity'.<sup>108</sup> Consequently, as James Mensch notes, the pure ego is not determined by worldly, 'constituted formation[s]' such as the body.<sup>109</sup> The pure ego is not in the world as a part within a whole; it is not objectively a part of the world, say, as a human being, a mother, daughter, etc. Indeed, according to Husserl, the pure ego contains 'nothing human' (as seen and determined from within the thesis of the natural attitude, and so, *a fortiori* from any natural-scientific theoretical standpoint adopted within that attitude).<sup>110</sup> Husserl insists

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<sup>105</sup> Sebastian Luft, 'Husserl's method of reduction', in *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology*, ed. by Sebastian Luft and Søren Overgaard (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 250; Held, 'Husserl's Phenomenological Method', in *The New Husserl*, ed. Welton, p. 23.

<sup>106</sup> Therefore, while the existence of the world depends on consciousness, the opposite is not true. The subject's relation to the world is based upon its fundamental difference from the latter. And it is this difference that provides the subject with its freedom, with the ability to step back and reflect on the world in a disinterested way. As Husserl writes, '[b]etween consciousness and reality there yawns a veritable abyss of meaning.' Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 93.

<sup>107</sup> As Husserl writes, 'consciousness, regarded in its "purity", amounts to a *self-contained context of being*, a context of *absolute being*, into which nothing can penetrate and from which nothing can escape'. Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Matt Bower, 'Husserl on Perception: A Nonrepresentationalism That Nearly Was', *European Journal of Philosophy* 25, no. 4 (2017), 1768-1790 (p. 1770). Indeed, since his aim is to secure unbiased, objective knowledge, Husserl believes that the pure ego, 'as a presupposition for knowledge of the world, cannot be and cannot remain presupposed as a worldly being', as this would hinder the ability of the phenomenologist to pursue such knowledge and become "genuine epistemology". James Mensch, *Decisions and Transformations: The Phenomenology of Embodiment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), p. 8.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. Mensch goes on to note that the point of Husserl's thought 'is not just to assert that "this ego must, through the phenomenological reduction and the epoché [...] be brought to transcendental purity" — i.e., freed from its relation to the body. It is to eliminate the body's role as determinative of consciousness'. Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>110</sup> Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, pp. 183-184.

that transcendental subjectivity contains ‘neither soul nor psychic life nor real psychophysical human beings; all this belongs to the “phenomenon”, to the world as a constituted pole’.<sup>111</sup> Transcendental subjectivity is ‘a structure that does not draw its final meaning from any given instance of being-in-relation, any given issue or problem of life, but is, rather, *both prior and independent*. That is: “prior and independent” to the sum total of discrete, factual relations, to the order of things, yet nevertheless contained “in” them, functioning anonymously, yet universally’.<sup>112</sup>

As such, in unlocking this absolute context of being that has been purified of any and all empirical particularities, Husserl believes that he has unlocked a realm that is not limited to the *a priori* modes of human knowledge, but which extends to include the *a priori* modes of knowledge in general, and which thereby applies to all possible experience, whether that of humans, extra-terrestrials, or God.<sup>113</sup>

Yet Husserl states that the subject is also an objective part of the world. As he himself would eventually acknowledge, this account of subjectivity — as described in the natural and theoretical attitudes — leads to a paradoxical situation in which the subject is at once that which constitutes the world and something that is itself incorporated within it. As Husserl asks, ‘[h]ow can a component part of the world, its human subjectivity, constitute the whole world, namely, constitute it as its intentional formation...?’<sup>114</sup> However, although Husserl would eventually acknowledge this paradox, as commentators such as Dermot Moran have observed, his statements regarding the status of the transcendental ego are often fairly ambiguous and perplexing, and he

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid. Cf. also Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 63, 102, 113, 138.

<sup>112</sup> Dodd, ‘Attitude - Facticity - Philosophy’, in *Alterity and Facticity*, ed. by Depraz and Zahavi, p. 64.

<sup>113</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 362.

<sup>114</sup> Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, pp. 180, 178.

ultimately does not provide a clear, detailed account of the identity of the transcendental ego and its relation to the empirical ego.<sup>115</sup> The problem is no mere side-issue for phenomenology. Insofar as the transcendental ego stands at the very heart of the phenomenological method, unless there is a sufficiently clear account of who or what this transcendental ego is, it is not possible to determine just what kind of validity the insights of phenomenology truly harbour. And until this has been established in sufficient detail, phenomenology must necessarily fall short as a first philosophy that would account for its own procedures and findings.

On account of this, it should come as no surprise that the phenomenological reduction has historically received no shortage of criticism.<sup>116</sup> Since its first formulation in *Ideas I*, Husserl's peers in Munich and Göttingen — such as Adolf Reinach, Johannes Daubert, Alexander Pfänder, Edith Stein and other so-called 'realist phenomenologists' —<sup>117</sup> rejected the transcendental turn altogether, viewing it as a turn away from the

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<sup>115</sup> Dermot Moran, *Edmund Husserl: Founder of Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), pp. 230-231.

<sup>116</sup> Apart from the basic issue of who or what the transcendental ego is, another prevalent issue in the relevant literature is whether this paradox amounts to a contradiction and fundamental problem for Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. On this point, there is no general agreement amongst Husserl scholars. While figures such as David Carr argue that it does, others, such as John Drummond, maintain that it does not. See David Carr, *The Paradox of Subjectivity: The self in the transcendental tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 9; John Drummond, 'Paradox or contradiction?' *Human Studies* 25, no. 1, 89-102.

<sup>117</sup> The so-called 'realist' followers of the early Husserl, based their positions on their interpretations of either Husserl's views on the intentionality of sense perception or the 'realism' of essences. There is a realism in the *Logical Investigations*, but it is not based upon Husserl's understanding of the intentionality of sense perception, but on the 'natural attitude' which is assumed and set aside in that study (and later rejected by Husserl). Regarding 'the realism of essences', this was also considered at the time as a kind of 'Platonism'. Whether we wish to call this 'realism' or 'Platonism', see Husserl's response to this interpretation in *Ideas*, §22: 'The Reproach of Platonic Realism. Essence and Concepts', pp. 40-42 (p. 41): 'I did not invent the universal concept of object; I only restored the concept required by all propositions of pure logic and pointed out that it is an essentially indispensable one and therefore that it also determines universal scientific language.' Cf. also Emmanuel Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, trans. by André Orianne (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 97; and de Boer, *The Development of Husserl's Thought*, pp. 263-269.

richness of ‘the things themselves’ and towards a kind of subjectivism.<sup>118</sup> More recently, Karl Schuhmann and Barry Smith have similarly argued that ‘Husserl, in his so-called transcendental reduction, wants to sever *all* ties with reality by substituting acts of reflection [i.e. on the universal structure of the pure ego] for straightforward ones, as if it were possible to bid farewell to the direct awareness of reality’ and that, as a result, Husserl’s phenomenology ultimately ‘not only retreats from reality, it bars to itself the very possibility of an access to it’.<sup>119</sup> On this reading, transcendental subjectivity emerges as an abstract, ethereal entity, which would supplant the empirical ego and its real everyday life as the proper object of phenomenological study.

In this case, it would be only natural to wonder whether the transcendental and empirical egos are simply two different, independent entities. If so, this would potentially resolve the paradox in question, though it may also fall prey to the accusations of Schuhmann, Smith and the realist phenomenologists. Yet this suggestion stands in contrast to Husserl’s own statements on the matter. Husserl makes it clear that it is the phenomenologist herself who comes to the transcendental ego. It is by engaging in the act of phenomenological reflection that the phenomenologizing individual brings about a split between the empirical and the transcendental ego, and so the two must be essentially connected in some way. If this is the case, then transcendental phenomenology would not necessarily close the subject off from the things themselves. At the same time, Husserl is no less clear that the split induced by the phenomenological reduction is a radical one, such that it brings about a qualitatively different kind of ego, and a wholly

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<sup>118</sup> Since there appeared many different versions of phenomenology that not only deviated significantly from Husserl’s original idea but also came into conflict with each other (e.g. Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Levinas) the question ‘what is phenomenology?’ emerged by the mid-half of the twentieth century. See Pierre Thévenaz, ‘Qu’est-ce que la phénoménologie?’, *Revue de théologie et de philosophie*, 9, no. 1 (1952), pp. 9–30.

<sup>119</sup> Karl Schuhmann and Barry Smith, ‘Against Idealism: Johannes Daubert vs. Husserl’s Ideas I’, *Review of Metaphysics* 38, no. 4 (1985), 763–793 (p. 459).

different kind of reflection. As he writes, the phenomenological reduction leaves us with ‘a very “unnatural” attitude and a very unnatural observation of self and world [...]. The unnatural life is the life of pure and radical self-reflection, self-reflection upon the pure “I am”, upon the pure egoic life’.<sup>120</sup> Though there obviously needs to be a union of some kind between the respective transcendental and empirical egos, Husserl does not address the nature of this union in detail or at any real length. While he spends considerable time outlining the basic structures of transcendental subjectivity and how it functions in constituting the world, he is ultimately rather unclear as to who or what this pure ego really is. Not surprisingly, then, there remains no consensus on this matter to this day.

In spite of these unresolved issues, in reducing the world to the way in which it constitutes itself according to the order of consciousness, Husserl contends that the subject is able to bring things to their absolute self-givenness. Husserl notes that transcendent objects in the world are spatial in essence and so they are given to consciousness in adumbration (i.e. partial spatial profiles). In principle, then, the perception of such things is always incomplete, inadequate and infinite. In contrast, he finds that the immanent contents (i.e. thoughts and experiences) of consciousness are given absolutely (i.e. in an immediate, transparent manner). For example, when we reflect upon the perceptual acts in which transcendent objects are given to us in partial profiles, these reflective acts themselves are not given in partial perspectives. They do not have a hidden backside, but *are* nothing more than *what they appear*, and so they are given as absolute.

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<sup>120</sup> Edmund Husserl, *First Philosophy: Lectures 1923/24 and Related Texts from the Manuscripts (1920-1925)*, trans. by Sebastian Luft and Thane Naberhaus (Dordrecht, Springer, 2018), p. 324.

In light of this, Husserl regards the immanence of consciousness as ‘*absolute and clear givenness, self-givenness in the absolute sense*’.<sup>121</sup> For him, absolute self-givenness is always a matter of objective awareness.<sup>122</sup> As he explains in *The Idea of Phenomenology*, the transcendental reduction thus necessarily involves a reduction of the vague, subject-relative givenness of transcendent things to the clear, absolute givenness of consciousness.<sup>123</sup>

More specifically, when this reduction follows after the eidetic reduction — i.e. after a shift from our natural focus on particular material objects toward a reflection on the essence of things — as it normally does in Husserl, the transcendental reduction involves a phenomenological reflection on the essential features of acts directed toward essences.<sup>124</sup> As Dagfinn Føllesdal notes, this is not the same as a reflection on the essential traits ‘of acts directed toward individual concrete objects’.<sup>125</sup> Therefore, it would seem that the order of the reductions does indeed matter.<sup>126</sup> By following this path, phenomenology comes into its own as an eidetic science of a purified transcenden-

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<sup>121</sup> Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. by Lee Hardy (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999), p. 27.

<sup>122</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 75-78, 153–155. Indeed, throughout his work, it is clear that Husserl views the analysis of objectifying acts of intentional consciousness as the most pressing endeavour for his phenomenology. See Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume I*, pp. 648, 570-571.

<sup>123</sup> Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, p. 27; Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. xx. Bearing this in mind, Alweiss notes that the philosopher essentially seeks ‘to return to the origins of thought itself. The original, absolute givenness toward which perception strives is transcendental subjectivity. The transcendental stream of consciousness as absolute describes nothing but this ideal of all knowledge, and is thus a structure that is defined by reason. Husserl refers to it as an originary reason. “Since the rational positing should be a positing originaliter, it must have its rational ground in the *originary givenness* in the full sense of what is determined: The X is not only meant in full determinedness, but is given originally precisely in this determinedness.” Perception does not aspire to an outside world, it does not strive toward an idea that is *posited* outside subjectivity; it intends an *originary* given that is immanent to transcendental subjectivity. Transcendental consciousness is an “absolute *telos*” of all knowing’. Alweiss, *The World Unclaimed*, p. 135; Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 340-341.

<sup>124</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: Second Book*, trans. by R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), p. 157. Henceforth abbreviated as *Ideas II*.

<sup>125</sup> Føllesdal, ‘Husserl’s Reductions and the Role They Play in His Phenomenology’, p. 112.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113. That being said, Føllesdal also points out that ‘there are some few texts where he [Husserl] seems to permit the reductions to come in either order [i.e. the transcendental reduction before the eidetic]. In that case, phenomenology would presumably comprise the study of both realms’. *Ibid.*



tal subjectivity, where the latter is understood as the ‘ever-present basis of all relation, [of] all presence that occurs within the purview of the “world”’.<sup>127</sup>

Bearing this in mind, it is important to remember that while the transcendental reduction requires consciousness to turn toward an analysis of its acts, contrary to what some commentators have maintained, this does not necessarily entail a neglect of the things themselves in favour of wild, solipsistic fantasy.<sup>128</sup> The transcendental reduction simply enables the subject to reflect in an unconditional manner on the essential features of the acts to which the essence of things are given and on which they depend, and to thereby recognise its naive world-belief for what it is: an unquestioned and phenomenologically unjustifiable assumption. In this sense, the transcendental phenomenologist is only interested in consciousness as the site of the world’s appearance. As Husserl himself observes, ‘though we have “excluded” the whole world with all physical things, living beings, and humans, ourselves included [...] [s]trictly speaking, we have not lost anything but rather have gained the whole of absolute being which, rightly understood, contains within itself, “constitutes” within itself, all worldly transcendencies’.<sup>129</sup> At its heart, then, the reduction opens one up to the possibility of obtaining true knowledge of the world as a whole, to seeing the world in its proper light, in terms of its Idea or truth as a world.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Dodd, ‘Attitude - Facticity - Philosophy’, p. 64.

<sup>128</sup> Schuhmann and Smith ‘Against Idealism: Johannes Daubert vs. Husserl’s Ideas I’, pp. 790-792.

<sup>129</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 113.

<sup>130</sup> In this sense, Husserl’s aim is always to return to an absolute subject that constitutes an ideal objective world. In his eyes, ‘the only world that ever can exist for me’, the only world that concerns the phenomenologist, is the ‘Objective world’ that is constituted by an absolute consciousness. See Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 26.

## CHAPTER 2

### HUSSERL'S ANALYTIC OF CONSTITUTION

While our critical exposition of Husserl's methodological procedure has shed some light on both its shortcomings and the way in which it is said to unlock transcendental subjectivity as the ultimate foundation of the world, to make good on this claim, nonetheless, Husserl must show how the transcendental ego constitutes the world. That is to say, he must reflectively elucidate those essential structures of transcendental subjectivity which enable things to appear to the subject as existing in themselves (i.e. in their objectivity).<sup>1</sup>

As we will see, Husserl views the process of constitution as unfolding through a series of layers — among them, perception, the body, and temporality. Between 1907 and 1909, Husserl comes to view temporality as the absolute foundation of all constitution of a meaningful world. In the process of demonstrating how the temporal structure of human consciousness makes it possible for that being to constitute the meaning of the world, he ultimately finds it necessary to set his sights on a still more fundamental question, namely, how is it that subjectivity, as this stream of inner temporality, is itself made possible? How is it that we are able to experience this stream of experiences as such? As we will see, Husserl argues that in order to truly account for subjectivity as the

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<sup>1</sup> To be sure, in the development of his thought, Husserl also tries to account for what Held describes as a 'narrower, more common sense' of objectivity. Held, 'Husserl's Phenomenology of the Life-World', in *The New Husserl*, ed. by Welton, p. 48. With this type of objectivity, Husserl endeavours to explain how it is that objects can appear in the same way to different people, despite the fact that they stand in different lived situations. An account of this kind of objectivity hinges upon an account of the constitution of intersubjectivity. We will address this form of objectivity at a later point. This chapter limits its focus to some of the key elements of subjectivity that makes this type of absolute objectivity possible.

ground of the world, there must be a more basic ground, that of the living present, or what he also refers to as the primordial ego or self.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, therefore, our study of Husserl's constitutive analyses will seek to clarify and critically assess his account of some of the essential structures — in particular, perception, the living body, temporality and the living present — that enable transcendental subjectivity to constitute the very existence and objectivity of the world as we know it. This will enable us to familiarise ourselves with Husserl's account of the inner nature of transcendental subjectivity and how it functions. In so doing, we will address the issue as to whether he is successful in making good on his claim that his phenomenology, through its focus on the living present as the defining nature of the very being of our human intentional consciousness, is able to deliver and present this absolute ground to and for phenomenological reflection.

## 2.1 THE PRIVILEGE OF PERCEPTION

Let us now turn to our study of Husserl's attempt to provide evidence for his assertion that the pure ego makes possible the constitution of the world. In order to demonstrate how intentional consciousness constitutes the world, Husserl must explain how consciousness transcends itself. In other words, how is it that consciousness relates to something other than itself? And how is it that, in the natural attitude, consciousness comes to apprehend things as existing in themselves? It is a defining feature of Husserl's phenomenology that the meaning of all concepts must be located in perceptu-

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<sup>2</sup> Husserl speaks to the 'reduction to the living present' as 'the most radical reduction' in *Zur Phänomenologischen Reduktion: Texte aus dem Nachlass (1926–1935)*, ed. by Sebastian Luft (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002), p. 187.

ally-founded acts. As such, he views perception as the example and ground of all intentional, lived experience.

The question, therefore, now arises as to how it is that perceptual consciousness transcends itself, such that it is able to constitute knowledge of objects as existing in themselves? Husserl's account of this matter begins with the observation that, although what is intuitively presented to us is not given to us in its entirety, we nevertheless perceive objects as a whole. This leads to his insistence that each intuition contains a variety of manners of givenness, or what he refers to as adumbrations.<sup>3</sup> While those adumbrations that are realised present the object to me as intuited, those that are not are experienced as potentialities, as that which, while not currently given, could be given at a later point for further legitimating outer perceptual-sense experiences. On this account, those adumbrations that are realised point toward certain potentialities and, in so doing, form referential interconnections with them (i.e. horizons of sense). Because a thing is spatial in essence, nonetheless, it can never form part of consciousness — in this sense it is 'transcendent' in a 'genuine' sense — and its mode of givenness, in principle, is given of *eidetic-ontological* necessity one-sidedly and in adumbration. This is an eidetic-ontological law governing the outer perceptual-sense experience of things, or 'thing-perception' as Husserl calls it in the reduction.

For Husserl, 'external perception harbours its inner and outer horizons'.<sup>4</sup> Because our perceptions involve internal horizons, for example, any content that fulfils a preceding intentional aim is given with a background, with a horizon of indeterminate,

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<sup>3</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 88, 91.

<sup>4</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, trans. by Anthony J. Steinbock (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001), pp. 108, 253.

perceptually co-given information.<sup>5</sup> The horizontal (i.e. referential) character of consciousness provides us with a rough idea of an intuitable whole, which stands beyond and pre-delineates whatever is intuitively given at any one moment in time.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, as Elliott indicates, ‘any “givens” of intuition are subject to an *a priori* pre-delineation, just as the artist makes sketches of the subject in advance, or the architect prepares a plan of the building to be constructed’.<sup>7</sup>

In this case, whatever is given is always preceded by an intentional anticipation, such that what is given to us either fulfils or disappoints our anticipation. This means that our perception of something always involves an anticipation of what is perceivable from other perspectives. According to Husserl, it is this anticipation that gives the subject in the natural attitude to take presumptively that things transcend what happens to be given to it at the moment, and that they therefore have an identity which subsists over time, and which exists in itself.

In fact, the horizontal nature of consciousness also results in the extension of this belief to the world.<sup>8</sup> In Husserl’s view, there is a certain endless or infinite nature to thing-perception in horizontal consciousness. In the course of everyday experience, to be sure, this or that anticipation may be disappointed. But such disappointments only ever lead to a change in the way we construe things, and not to an utter nothingness. In this way, horizontal consciousness always leads us onto something else, and this endlessness of horizontal consciousness gives us a sense of the world as a seemingly in-

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<sup>5</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 94. Meanwhile, external horizons refer to what perception grasps of an object’s relation to one’s own physical body, other objects and the surrounding environment in general.

<sup>6</sup> Elliott, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15. In other words, ‘the ‘sense’ of the given for Husserl is always informed by an intentional ‘pre-sense’’. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 9, 98-99.

dubitable horizon of all horizons, as a universal horizon that cannot be negated, on the basis of which consciousness can grasp particular objects. The horizontal nature of consciousness therefore gives us to believe in the world as this ever-enduring ground of experience, as this ground whose identity transcends our changing lived experiences of things, and which thus seems to exist in itself.

In order to fully explain how horizontal consciousness is able to anticipate and apprehend things as existing in themselves, though, we still need to draw out the specific components that are involved in this process. What initiates our anticipation of things, Husserl tells us, are the absent yet co-given properties or adumbrations. As these adumbrations are not the focus of our attention, they remain unthematic and vague. As such, they are not presented to me as full-fledged objects, but as non-objective, non-intentional sensory (or *hyletic*) content.<sup>9</sup> Because we do not encounter these adumbrations as objects, Husserl maintains that *hyle* are *reel*, immanent moments of consciousness.<sup>10</sup> That is to say, sensory contents seem to be a mind-bound affair, though Husserl's position on this undergoes some changes in his later years.<sup>11</sup> The main reason for this is that raw sensation is viewed by Husserl as too indeterminate to make contact with the world as such. That being said, as Matt Bower points out, this is not to say that sensation is 'utterly unstructured', only that it is ambiguous or obscure.<sup>12</sup> As

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 204-205.

<sup>10</sup> Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, trans. by John Barnett Brough (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991), p. 106.

<sup>11</sup> While the Husserl of *Ideas I* regards sensation as raw stuff that is immanent to consciousness, as Jeremy Smith notes, the later Husserl seems to regard it as an immanent alterity or transcendence, and so, as 'the primordial manifestation of the world, prior to the emergence of explicit objects, belonging intrinsically to subjectivity'. See Jeremy Smith, 'Michel Henry's Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience and Husserlian Intentionality', pp. 201-203. For more on this point, see Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity: A Phenomenological Investigation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999) pp. 120-121, 200-202; Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität: Zweiter Teil: 1921-1928*, ed. by Kern Iso (Nijhoff, Den Haag, 1973) p. 379; Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität: Dritter Teil: 1929-1935*, ed. by Kern Iso (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p. 287.

<sup>12</sup> Bower, 'Husserl on Perception', p. 1787; Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 204-205.

such, though, raw sensation is said to merely provide the material for the potential appearance of the world. It is through sensation that consciousness can access the objective world's vast array of colours, shapes, sounds, smells and so on.

In order to actually make contact with objectively existing things, however, *hyletic* sensations need to be formed or interpreted by more complex mental acts, by noetic acts of apprehension.<sup>13</sup> For Husserl, then, the '[t]he stream of phenomenological being has a [*hyletic*] stuff-stratum and a noetic stratum.'<sup>14</sup> By virtue of the privileged role it seems to play in the constitution of the world, Husserl insists that the *hyletic* stratum 'obviously stands far below the noetic', and that '[t]he incomparably more important and fruitful analyses belong to the noetical side.'<sup>15</sup> By forming or interpreting indeterminate sensory content, it is these noetic acts that allow consciousness to apprehend or apperceive an objectivity as revealing itself through the sensory content. While sensuous *hyle*, which Husserl regards as the basic substratum of experience, is needed to get this constitutive process underway, it is the apperception of the sensuous data that enables consciousness to transcend itself and to construct (i.e. constitute the meaning of) objects as such.<sup>16</sup> In so doing, Husserl finds that consciousness is directed toward more than what is currently given. In apperceiving the object as such, then, consciousness simultaneously anticipates the possibility of experiencing the object in its entirety.<sup>17</sup> In this way, apperception not only presents objects to us, but it also appre-

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 205-207. In this sense, Husserl does not believe that sensation has its own 'world-involving intentionality'; this only arises from its being caught up in animating acts of apprehension or interpretation. See Bower, 'Husserl on Perception', p. 1787. Because of this, Didier Franck notes that Husserl views sensation as 'negative and relative to intentionality'. Didier Franck, 'The Object of Phenomenology', in *Nietzsche and Phenomenology*, ed. by Élodie Boubilil and Christine Daigle (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), pp. 258-273 (p. 265).

<sup>14</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 207.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 207, 210.

<sup>16</sup> Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume II*, p. 105.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 341; Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 250, 267.

sents properties of the object that are not currently given, but which could be from another perspective.<sup>18</sup> In giving rise to these appresentations, apperception constitutes horizons of sense, which enables the individual in the natural attitude to apprehend objects as transcending what is given to it at the moment, and, in this sense, as existing in themselves.

However, as we know, in a philosophical-phenomenological attitude, one refrains from any belief in the existence or non-existence of the world and, in a disinterested fashion, reflects on *the how* of an object in its appearance to consciousness. In so doing, the philosopher *qua* phenomenologist comes to understand that the object that appears to the naive individual in the natural attitude as existing in itself is in fact the noema, which is to say, something that is constituted by a corresponding noetic apprehension.<sup>19</sup> As such, the noema is deemed to be essential to consciousness, but it is not a real part of it.<sup>20</sup> In other words, the noema is the object *as perceptual meaning*; it is the object *as experienced*, which is distinct from the transcendent object itself, understood as ‘the bearer of the object’s properties’.<sup>21</sup>

The relation between the noema and the object in Husserl is a complicated and contentious one. John Drummond has shown, in compelling fashion, that the distinction is not in fact one between two distinct entities, but between two different perspec-

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 125-126. This means that our perceptions do not merely present us with whatever sensory information is given to us at a particular moment — they also appresent ‘non-sensory a-modal information. A-modal information concerns co-present properties that are not part of the sensory makeup of perceptual experience at a given moment’. Matt Bower, ‘Affectively Driven Perception: Toward a Non-representational Phenomenology’, *Husserl Studies*, 30, no. 3 (2014), 225-245 (p. 4). It is the appresentational character of consciousness that enables us to have access to the full (objective) presence of things. Ibid., pp. 3, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 213-214.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, ‘Michel Henry’s Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience and Husserlian Intentionality’, p. 207.



tives on one and the same entity.<sup>22</sup> According to Drummond's interpretation, Husserl locates the relation between consciousness and the object within the noema itself.<sup>23</sup> On this view, the noematic core is the meaning or sense of the object in its fullness, while the object itself is the innermost moment of the noema.<sup>24</sup> On this reading, there is thus a strong intimacy between noema and object. Owing to this intimacy, when consciousness transcends its own 'reel' moments — raw sense stuff and its noetic apprehension — it encounters the real, concrete object *as noematic sense*.<sup>25</sup> It is this object that appears to consciousness owing to its constituting activity.

The process of constitution is therefore seen by Husserl as essentially a matter of sense-bestowal (i.e. apperceptive objectification).<sup>26</sup> It is noetic sense-giving that is essential to perceptual consciousness — i.e. without noetic sense-giving, there is no per-

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<sup>22</sup> John Drummond, *Husserlian intentionality and non-foundational realism: Noema and object* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990); John Drummond, 'The structure of intentionality', in *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Donn Welton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003). The other dominant view of the view, which is known as the West Coast interpretation — Drummond's interpretation being that of the East Coast — is that the noema and the object are two ontologically distinct entities. Apart from the fact that this position stands in contrast to some of Husserl's other findings, the drawback of this position is that it makes Husserl adopt more of a strictly representationalist stance towards things than he perhaps really did. See David Woodruff Smith, *Husserl* (New York: Routledge, 2007); David Woodruff Smith and Ronald McIntyre, 'Husserl's identification of meaning and noema', *The Monist* 59, no. 1 (1975), 115–132.

<sup>23</sup> Drummond, *Husserlian intentionality and non-foundational realism*, p. 138; Drummond, 'The structure of intentionality', pp. 190–192.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, 'Michel Henry's Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience and Husserlian Intentionality', p. 207. Speaking to the difference between noema and object, Smith notes that while 'the tree itself performs photosynthesis and can burn up in a fire', the suggestion 'that our experience of the tree, either as noesis or noema, should burn up or perform photosynthesis is in an absolute sense unthinkable.' *Ibid.*, p. 200. Given the intimacy between noema and object that is highlighted in Drummond's interpretation, one may wonder whether Drummond himself goes far enough in stressing the degree of intimacy between noema and object. As Smith notes, '[i]n describing the transcendent object as the innermost moment of the noema, we are clearly asserting the inseparability of object and noema. But in the case of a perceptual noema, this inseparability has such an intimate character that there is simply no question of two distinct objects being objectifiable in any sense, even within their inseparability. And if the real object were a moment of the noema, the question would arise, how do we know that moment? Through another noema? The unique, incomparable, connection between [noematic] meaning and object is demonstrated by the infinite regress this question leads to'. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>25</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 213–214.

<sup>26</sup> The noetic-noematic structure therefore 'designates the correlational a priori [of intentionality] in its universal form. It signifies the *essential relatedness* of world and conscious life'. Sebastian Luft, 'Husserl's Theory of the Phenomenological Reduction', p. 203.

ception or world of things as known — and which drives its constituting activity. By transcending its own reel moments and synthesising *hyletic* data into objectivities, the subject relates to real objects through their corresponding noematic sense. As a result, as Mohanty aptly sums up, for Husserl, ‘our experiencing-of-the-world in its inmost nature’ is essentially a matter of sense-bestowal (*Sinngebung*).<sup>27</sup>

## 2.2 FLESH AND BODY

While Husserl undoubtedly views the perceptual constitution of the world as driven by noetic sense-bestowal, around the time of *Ideas II*, he begins to realise that an account of perceptual constitution remains incomplete until we come to some understanding of the complex role of the perceiving body.<sup>28</sup> To understand the role of one’s own body in the perceptual constitution of the world, we first need to understand what the body is for Husserl, and how it relates to the transcendental ego.

As is well known, Husserl draws a distinction between two interconnected concepts of the body: the lived body (*Leib*) or flesh and the objective or physical body (*Körper*). The body (as *Körper*) is a spatial-temporal object replete with physical-chemical properties given to acts of outer perceptual-sense experiences. Meanwhile, and by comparison, the body as lived (*Leib*) is my body as revealed to me in my first-person lived experience — i.e. via kinaesthetic sensations, interoception, proprioception and so forth. For Husserl, the body is first (and primarily) known as an object of outer sense perception, which the subject takes over as its own — that is, as a lived body — by

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<sup>27</sup> J.N. Mohanty, *Phenomenology: Between Essentialism and Transcendental Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997), p. 57.

<sup>28</sup> Husserl, *Ideas II*, p. 161.

virtue of the distinct double aspect specific to the sense of touch.<sup>29</sup> In his words, ‘the body as such can be constituted originally *only in* tactuality and in everything localised within the sensations of touch, such as warmth, cold, pain, and the like’.<sup>30</sup> When one hand touches the other, the hand that is touched by the other appears to me as touched, but also as itself a site of tactile sensation. Once awoken as this site of sensation, the touched hand responds by itself becoming a lived body. As Husserl writes, ‘when I touch the left hand I also find in it, too, series of touch-sensations, which are “*localized*” in it, though these are not constitutive of properties (such as roughness or smoothness of the hand, of this physical thing) [...]. If I do include them, then it is not that the physical thing is now richer, but instead *it becomes Body, it senses*’.<sup>31</sup>

What is interesting to note about this account of the awakening of the lived body, as Claude Romano points out, is that ‘the whole description proceeds as if my lived-body, at the beginning, were merely a body among others [accessible via act of outer perceptual-sense experiences], that is to say, were not at all *my* body; for my body, too, “is perceived from the outside,” writes Husserl, “although within certain limits”.’<sup>32</sup> Husserl can claim that the body is, *in a way*, perceived from the outside,

because it *is* in a certain way outside myself. Indeed, from the transcendental point of view, I have a body, but I *am* not my body: the *Leib* is not a ‘component piece of the *Ego*’, it remains ‘foreign to the pure *Ego* (*Ichfremde*)’. In short, my body is something I ‘possess’, something which depends on my pure Ego, but ‘does not belong to the realm of what properly pertains to the Ego (*Ichliche*)’; it is only ‘the Ego’s first “subjective possession”’, and only the *Ego* can be called a subjectivity in the authentic and originary sense. Refractory to any inclusion in

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 150-151, 158.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 152. As per this account, the objective body is constituted as mine (i.e. as a lived body) when, by virtue of my sense of touch, I become aware of it as the carrier of my sensations.

<sup>32</sup> Claude Romano, ‘After the lived-body’, *Continental Philosophy Review* 49, no. 4 (2016), 445-468 (pp. 455-456); Husserl, *Ideas II*, 152. Taylor Carman makes a similar point in ‘The Body in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty’, *Philosophical Topics* 27, no. 2 (1999), 205-226 (p. 211).

the world, the pure *Ego* is *only secondarily* incarnated in a lived-body and always remains in principle irreducible to it.<sup>33</sup>

For Husserl, then, the transcendental ego consists in a pure mental awareness of itself, which logically precedes and is independent of anything outside itself, including its body.<sup>34</sup> In sum, as Taylor Carman remarks, the lived body is something that ‘an essentially disembodied transcendental ego *has* or *owns* as the locus of its subjective sensations. The lived body is not itself constitutive of intentionality, for Husserl, but is a noetic achievement of transcendental subjectivity’.<sup>35</sup>

Given this distinction between the pure ego and the body, Husserl views the latter as essentially an object, though, to be sure, a uniquely intimate, privileged one. As he writes,

[a]mong the bodies [*Körper*] belonging to this ‘Nature’[...] I then find my *animate organism* [*Leib*] as *uniquely* singled out — namely as [...] the only Object ‘in’ which I ‘*rule and govern*’ *immediately*, governing particularly in each of its ‘organs’. Touching kinaesthetically I perceive ‘with’ my hands; seeing kinesthetically, I perceive also ‘with’ my eyes; and so forth; moreover I can perceive thus at any time. Meanwhile the *kinesthesias* pertaining to the organs flow in the mode ‘I am doing’, and are subject to my ‘I can’; furthermore, by calling these kinesthesias into play, I can push, thrust, and so forth, and can thereby ‘*act*’ *somatically* — immediately, and then mediately.<sup>36</sup>

The body is that unique object in which the subject holds sway in an immediate way — it is the immediate organ of my will (i.e. the ‘I can’).<sup>37</sup> The ego and its lived body form a unity, which renders the body the unique site through which I engage with the world.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Romano, ‘After the lived-body’, p. 456; Husserl, *Ideas II*, pp. 223, 226, 259.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150-152.

<sup>35</sup> Carman, ‘The Body in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty’, p. 221. In ‘its most primitive manifestation, then, the body does not coincide with the subject of experience itself, but is instead a “field of localization” of feelings *belonging to* the subject’. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>36</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 97.

<sup>37</sup> Husserl, *Ideas II*, p. 159.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62, 166. For more on this, see Irene McMullin, ‘Embodied Expression: The Role of the Lived Body in Husserl’s Notion of Intention Fulfilment’, *European Journal of Philosophy* 25, no. 4 (2017), 1739-1767 (p. 1739).

As such, the lived-body is seen by Husserl as the most basic substratum of experience, as that in terms of which all other objects are perceived.

As the immediate expression of my will, Husserl comes to view the body as playing an important role in the perceptual constitution of the world. As he writes, the body functions as ‘the *medium of all perception*; it is the *organ of perception* and is *necessarily* involved in all perception’.<sup>39</sup> As a result, knowledge is not simply a matter of consciousness but of the body as well. Husserl’s study of how objective things are constituted leads him to the basic realisation that objects are only perceived when they stand over and against us. Spatial objects thus not only presuppose an onlooker, but an embodied one, one that occupies a certain spatial extension. The constitution of spatial objects thus presupposes an embodied consciousness. As Husserl writes,

things appear and do so from this or that side, and in this mode of appearing is included irrevocably a relation to a here and its basic directions. All spatial being necessarily appears in such a way that it appears either nearer or farther, above or below, right or left. This holds with regard to all points of the appearing corporeality, which then have their differences in relation to one another as regards this nearness, this above and below, etc., among which there are hereby peculiar qualities of appearance, stratified-like dimensions. The Body then has, for its particular Ego, the unique distinction of bearing in itself the *zero point* of all these orientations. One of its spatial points, even if not an actually seen one, is always characterized in the mode of the ultimate central here: that is, a here which has no other here outside of itself, in relation to which it would be a ‘there’. It is thus that all things of the surrounding world possess an orientation to the Body, just as, accordingly, all expressions of orientation imply this relation.<sup>40</sup>

As this indicates, objects can be perceived as over there because my body ‘is always ‘here,’ as this absolute centre of orientation.<sup>41</sup> It is this absolute here-ness of the body that enables all other things to be experienced as there.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, I understand spatial

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<sup>39</sup> Husserl, *Ideas II*, p. 61.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>42</sup> Unlike its relation to other objects, the ego cannot distance itself from its body; it is united with it as this absolute here. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

relationships such as left-right, near-far, etc., in terms of their relation to my body. As a result, it must be said that our perceptual landscape is necessarily determined through bodily movement.

Because of this, we necessarily experience the unity and continuity of the world through our body.<sup>43</sup> Since the body serves,

as the bearer of the zero point of orientation, the bearer of the here and the now, out of which the pure Ego intuits space and the whole world of the senses [...] each thing that appears has *eo ipso* an orienting relation to the body, and this refers not only to what actually appears but to each thing that is supposed to be able to appear. If I am imagining a centaur I cannot help but imagine it as in a certain orientation and in a particular relation to my sense organs: it is ‘to the right’ of me; it is ‘approaching’ me or ‘moving away’; it is ‘revolving’, turning toward or away from ‘me’ — from me, i.e., from my Body, from my eye, which is directed at it.<sup>44</sup>

The world as a whole is always experienced in relation to my body. Even those objects that we imagine bear a necessary relation to one’s own body. And ‘in virtue of its faculty of free mobility’, the embodied subject can ‘induce the flow of the system of its appearances and, along with that, the orientations’ — i.e. it induces all appearances to adjust themselves to the positions of our moving body.<sup>45</sup>

It is this movement of the body that enables perception to function in the mobile way that it does. As Irene McMullin notes,

[w]e experience spatiotemporal objects as having a horizon of possible future profiles because of the possibility of getting closer and grasping: a possibility that is dependent on the ego successfully holding sway over the body such that it is the effective vehicle of its striving. The active agency of the body accomplishing the ego’s intentional orientation is a necessary condition of the elements constitutive of any particular perception. Moving one’s eyes this way or that is necessary to gather visual data, applying pressure on something allows one to assess its resistance, etc.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 165-166.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 61-62.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>46</sup> McMullin, ‘Embodied Expression’, p. 1746.

In all of these ways, then, the perceptual constitution of the world depends on the body, as that unique object through which the will of the (conscious) ego is expressed in an immediate way.

### 2.3 PASSIVE SYNTHESIS

As Husserl's work develops, he comes to realise that intentionality has a greater depth than he originally envisioned. Intentionality involves not only the activity of the ego, but also functions on a passive level, prior to any active position-taking or attentiveness on the part of the ego — i.e. in kinaesthetic consciousness, and passive affectivity and association.<sup>47</sup> To be clear, Husserl does not view this passive affectivity as utterly passive, but as the lowest level of activity.<sup>48</sup> On this level, the subject who finds herself affectively moved by certain alluring contents, and who develops a particular style of bodily comportment by responding to them in turn, gradually develops certain 'implicit preferential structures' — what Anthony Steinbock calls a 'dispositional orientation.'<sup>49</sup> This dispositional orientation "allow[s] the phenomena to organize themselves according to primordial laws of association. In these cases, what we have are precisely the affective formation of sense-unities'.<sup>50</sup> By virtue of our bodily style of comportment, our perceptual landscape takes on 'a particular [affective] configuration', where certain

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<sup>47</sup> Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, p. 210.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 510.

<sup>49</sup> Anthony J. Steinbock, 'Affection and attention: On the phenomenology of becoming aware', *Continental Philosophy Review* 37, no. 1 (2004), 21-43 (p. 28).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*; Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, pp. 199-200, 211-213, 216-217.

contents stand out for me as being in some way more significant than others.<sup>51</sup> We can see this affective awakening of the environment in the following example given by Steinbock:

[w]hile climbing on a rock face I have before me a rough, tan-coloured surface organized willy-nilly all along the face of the cliff. Half way up the rock face a protrusion suddenly distinguishes itself from the others because it is white [...]. Now it becomes especially affective for itself, but it also ‘pairs’ in a transference of sense with another white protrusion, and then simultaneously calls for a series of protrusions (some white, some not) into its ‘nexus’; it illuminates an entire path of protrusions, precisely both as ‘grips’ and as etching a ‘pathway’. The entire path gets affectively articulated whereas prior to this it was affectively unarticulated [...]. In this case, as the protrusion becomes prominent it emerges simultaneously as affectively significant, enough so that it ‘stands out’ for me; its whiteness pairs with another white protrusion a small distance from it; they form a kind of co-present whole. Here they, together, prefigure a pathway to the top of the cliff, at least a potential passage, illuminating an entire string of both white-coloured and non-white coloured protrusions; they gain an affective priority.<sup>52</sup>

Whether these white marks motivate me to actually respond to them will depend on my particular style of comportment (i.e. on my dispositional orientation). For the individual who is not an experienced climber, or who has a different background and style, these white marks may not stand out, and the individual may instead find herself drawn to another affective pairing altogether.<sup>53</sup>

Notably, this affective propagation of sense occurs not only in the present moment, but also in the past and future phases of time. For example, as Steinbock observes, suppose I hear a melody while I am ‘busy doing something else; it does not even register as a disturbance. Now there is a phase that arouses either a particular pleasure or displeasure. The entire melody in the immediate present is accentuated, and in one stroke [...] the affection and the pleasure or displeasure “*radiates back*” into the preced-

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<sup>51</sup> Steinbock, ‘Affection and Attention’, p. 28; Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, pp. 47, 199-201.

<sup>52</sup> Steinbock, ‘Affection and Attention’, p. 29.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.



ing phase of time, “affectively highlighting it as a unity”.<sup>54</sup> In this case, ‘it is not only the present that gives the past an affective force that it never had before, but the whole melody gives even the instigating present a new affective prominence as a part of the whole melody.’<sup>55</sup> Finally, this affective propagation of sense can occur in relation to the future. In his analysis of passive association, Husserl maintains that when something is received on a passive level — say, the sound of a distant, constantly chiming bell — and it gradually slinks back into the past, as ‘this particular givenness “lingers,” and the new affective force of the present [the new impression of the chiming bell] “reanimates” the preceding phase of time ‘by virtue of a retroactive transference of sense, the call for this particular futural course [the reappearance of the chiming bell] is intensified’.<sup>56</sup> In this way, ‘a constitutive teleology is in play such that the affective force of a future occurrence confers its force upon present “possibilities” allowing some to be given and allowing others not to be seen. The force radiates out from it in such a way that it accentuates objects that will fulfil the conditions for forming a uniform configuration’.<sup>57</sup>

On Husserl’s account, these passive associations do not yet give us objects or the world as such, but rather what he refers to as pre-constituted ‘object-like formation[s]’, or pre-given sense-unities.<sup>58</sup> That being said, these pre-given sense-unities do serve as a condition for the perceptual constitution of worldly objects and events.<sup>59</sup> According to

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 30; Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, pp. 202-203.

<sup>55</sup> Steinbock, ‘Affection and Attention’, p. 30.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid; Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, pp. 202-203.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 210, 213-214.; Edmund Husserl, *Die Bernauer Manuskripte über das Zeitbewusstsein: (1917/18)*, ed. by Rudolf Bernet and Dieter Lohmar (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001), p. 191.

Husserl, then, it is when the passive associations of this lower-level are taken up by acts of attention and reflection that the world is constituted as such.<sup>60</sup>

## 2.4 THE DEPTHS OF TIME

As these last examples suggest, our lived experience seems to be invariably and necessarily structured in temporal terms, in terms of present, past and future. While Husserl's investigation of temporality in 1905 simply focusses on constituted experiences (i.e. acts and sensory contents), between 1907 and 1909, he realises that 'immanent' time-consciousness — i.e. the synthesis of temporality — serves as the absolute foundation of all constitution, and is thereby responsible for the unity and continuity of our experience.<sup>61</sup> Temporality thus serves as the universal form of all conscious life, such that we exist temporally.<sup>62</sup> As such, the study of time is seen by Husserl as 'the most difficult of all phenomenological problems', and yet as also 'perhaps the most important in the whole of phenomenology'.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, p. 210.

<sup>61</sup> When Husserl came to publish his initial early 1905 lectures and later reflections on the experience of time in the late 1920s, he asked Heidegger to edit them. Husserl was quite unhappy with the poor quality of Heidegger's editorial work (that Husserl's assistant Edith Stein had transcribed and edited, with Heidegger doing very little work on them) and very unhappy in particular with the title of 'Time-Consciousness' that Heidegger had proposed for them. Husserl proposed the titles: 'On the Phenomenology of Inner Time-Consciousness', or 'On the Phenomenology of Immanent Time-Consciousness'. Heidegger selected the first one *Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins*, when publishing these in 1928. See Edmund Husserl, 'May 9, 1928: Edmund Husserl to Martin Heidegger', in *Becoming Heidegger: On the Trail of His Early Occasional Writings, 1910-1927*, ed. by Theodore Kisiel and Thomas Sheehan (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 394, and Husserl's letter to Rickert on December 26, 1928 (Ibid., p. 395). See Cyril McDonnell, *Heidegger's Way Through Phenomenology To the Question of the Meaning of Being: A Study of Heidegger's Philosophical Path of Thinking from 1909 to 1927* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2015), p. 259, note 8.

<sup>62</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, p. 73; Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, p. 169. Nicolas de Warren addresses Husserl's account of time as the fundamental problem of transcendental phenomenology at length in *Husserl and the Promise of Time: Subjectivity in Transcendental Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>63</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, pp. 286, 346.

As with all of his constitutive analyses, Husserl's study of time is oriented around the attempt to show how objectivity arises for consciousness — i.e. how things appear as existing in themselves.<sup>64</sup> Beginning with the study of perceived things — as the paradigm of constitution — he notices that 'all manners of givenness are subject to temporal succession because they are situated in my flow of consciousness'.<sup>65</sup> As such, Husserl contends that consciousness can order transcendent objects according to what he calls objective time (i.e. clock time), which consists in a linear sequence of discrete units or now-points (i.e. not-yet-now, now, no-longer-now). Because perceived things are given according to the temporal succession of consciousness, they always occupy a 'definite temporal position' in this succession — i.e. as before or after one another, even as they move ever-further away from the present now.<sup>66</sup> As a result, the period of these objects' existence is quantifiable and datable.<sup>67</sup> The fact that objects are seen as existing in themselves thus 'follows fundamentally from the fact that these objects are present at a determinable point in time, or over a succession of such points in "*objective time*"'.<sup>68</sup>

What remains for Husserl to determine is how this objective time is constituted and known by consciousness in an original way. He begins by observing that the present now-point is experienced by us as occupying a privileged position in this sequence.<sup>69</sup> As John Brough notes in the introduction to the time-lectures, one of the ways in which the present-now is privileged is

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<sup>64</sup> Held, 'Husserl's Phenomenology of the Life-World', p. 43.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 44; Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, p. xxx.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 7, xxx, 67-68.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 7

<sup>68</sup> Held, 'Husserl's Phenomenology of the Life-World', p. 44.

<sup>69</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, pp. 37-38.

as a point of orientation. Like the ‘here’ from which I look out into the world and around which I orient my perceptual space, the now supplies the point of reference for temporal experience. It is in relation to the that things and events appear as past or future. Another side of the now’s role shows itself in the fact that I am conscious of a past object or event as something that *was once now*; similarly, I am conscious of whatever is in the future as something that will be now.<sup>70</sup>

As a part of this, past and future moments are further arranged in terms of their distance from the present-now — i.e. as having just occurred a day ago, a month ago, as something that might occur shortly, or somewhere down the line.

The temporal dimensions of past and future are given by way of remembrance and expectation. These acts belong to the level of temporality that is immanent to consciousness (i.e. subjective time). Through recollection and expectation, we re-present the past and the future. As we can only remember what has already been given to us in the present via perception, memory is always related back to its originary manner of givenness as “‘presenting’”.<sup>71</sup> As Husserl writes, ‘[m]emory is the re-presentation of something itself in the sense of the past. The present memory is a phenomenon wholly analogous to perception. It has the appearance of the object in common with the corresponding perception, except that the appearance has a modified character, in consequence of which the object does not stand before me as present but as having been present.’<sup>72</sup> Similarly, since that which we expect ‘finds its fulfilment in a perception’,

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. xxvi.

<sup>71</sup> Held, ‘Husserl’s Phenomenology of the Life-World’, p. 44. As we will see, Husserl distinguishes between primary and secondary memory. Primary memory (retention) is our consciousness of the object just as it is elapsing — it presents the past in an original manner. Meanwhile, secondary memory (i.e. recollection) gives the object once again, as having once been. Secondary memory therefore re-presents the past. As Husserl writes, recollection can occur as ‘a simple grasping, as when a memory “rises to the surface” and we look at what is remembered in a flash. In this case what is remembered is vague; perhaps the memory brings forward, intuitively, a privileged momentary phase, but it does not repeat its object’. Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, p. 39. Or else we ‘execute a memory that actually does reproduce and repeat, a memory in which the temporal object is completely build up afresh in a continuum of re-presentations and in which we perceive it again, as it were — but only “as it were.” The whole process is a re-presentational modification of the perceptual process with all of the latter’s phases and stages’. Ibid. Husserl similarly distinguishes between primary and secondary expectation. Ibid., pp. 43, 101, 240, 328.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

expectation is itself always related to its originary manner of givenness as ‘presenting.’<sup>73</sup>

Subjective time thus consists in this stream of mental states, with perception serving as the central reference point.<sup>74</sup> Subjective time, whose structure consists in this succession of mental states, is the essential condition that makes possible objective time. Our ability to order and measure objects in objective time, and thus view them as existing in themselves, is made possible by the fact that such objects are given to us as occupying a fixed place in the temporal succession of our mental states.

Once Husserl comes to this finding, though, he finds himself faced with the following question: while subjective time makes it possible for us to apprehend objects and the world as existing in themselves in objective time, what makes subjective time possible? How is it that we are able to constitute and know subjective time as this succession of mental states and thereby order things in objective time? If consciousness was merely swept along in this succession, then it would not be possible for us to be aware of the succession of temporal acts and to grasp transcendent objects in objective time.

Husserl maintains that it is only if our conscious life occupies a kind of fixed place amidst this succession that the latter can stand out as such by way of contrast.<sup>75</sup> He contends that it is only because consciousness has a continuous, unvarying inner awareness of itself that it is able to unify and apprehend its succession of mental experi-

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>74</sup> As Husserl writes, ‘[i]t is certainly evident that the perception of a temporal object itself has temporality, that the perception of duration itself presupposes the duration of perception, that the perception of any temporal form itself has its temporal form.’ Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>75</sup> John B. Brough, ‘Notes on the Absolute Time-Constituting Flow of Consciousness’, in *On Time: New Contributions to the Husserlian Phenomenology of Time*, ed. by Dieter Lohmar and Ichiro Yamaguchi (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), pp. 21-49 (pp. 45-46).

ences and thereby perceive objects in objective time.<sup>76</sup> This newfound level of inner time-consciousness stands as the underlying universal form of conscious life. It is the foundation and most basic form of synthesis, which works anonymously and implicitly in all other forms of synthesis.

In this respect, Sokolowski remarks that Husserl's study of time reveals 'that the apodictic field of inner experience, which we have gained by [transcendental] reduction, is not really the ultimate absolute'.<sup>77</sup> As Husserl himself put this in *Ideas I*, '[t]he transcendently 'absolute' which we have brought about by the reductions is, in truth, not what is ultimate; it is something which constitutes itself in a certain profound and completely peculiar sense of its own and which has its primal source in what is ultimately and truly absolute [i.e. the living present].'<sup>78</sup> Therefore, as Sokolowski rightly notes, '[t]he absolute which we attain through [the transcendental] reduction is not the ultimate goal of phenomenology. It points back to something still more fundamental [...] the truly final absolute. Thus the stream of consciousness is now seen to be itself "relative" to another "absolute", one which is absolute in a new sense'.<sup>79</sup> In this case, '[j]ust as subjectivity is required as the condition of possibility for the real world, the present in-

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<sup>76</sup> To be able to grasp a succession of events as such, the flow of absolute consciousness must have an invariant form and speed.

<sup>77</sup> Robert Sokolowski, *The Formation of Husserl's Concept of Constitution* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), pp. 160, 199.

<sup>78</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 198. Husserl's setting aside of the issue of time as the determining feature of our actual consciousness *in the argument* of the reduction of the natural attitude to the transcendental-phenomenological attitude that unlocks the absolute mode of being of our actual consciousness in the 'Fundamental Considerations of Phenomenology' of *Ideas I*, however, was to establish apodictic knowledge of the existence of consciousness first. Consequently, the phenomenological investigations into its structure and features could be more readily secured in such a science of absolute intentional consciousness and its objectivities. This is why Husserl remarks in 'The Fundamental Consideration of Phenomenology' that he can forgo his earlier investigations into the experience of time 'without endangering their rigour', that is, the apodictic arguments for the relative existence of the world of things and the absolute existence of consciousness in the reduction, and so, 'fortunately we [Husserl] can leave out of account the enigma of consciousness of time'. Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 193–194. See McDonnell, *Heidegger's Way Through Phenomenology*, p. 259.

<sup>79</sup> Sokolowski, *The Formation of Husserl's Concept of Constitution*, pp. 199–200.

stant [i.e. the living present] is required as the condition for subjectivity.<sup>80</sup> In other words, subjective time, as the absolute foundation of the world, itself depends upon a more basic absolute, a final and true absolute, which, as such, constitutes itself, and so does not require a still more basic ground to account for itself.<sup>81</sup>

There are therefore three connected levels of constitution involved in internal-time-consciousness. Husserl first spoke to this matter in a text written between 1907 and 1909, in which he differentiates between:

1. the things of empirical experience in objective time [. . . ;]
2. the constituting multiplicities [...] the immanent unities in pre-empirical time;
3. the absolute time-constituting flow of consciousness.<sup>82</sup>

As Brough points out, around 1911 or 1912, Husserl describes these levels as follows:

1. the internal consciousness, the *experiencing* [formerly level 3],
2. the *experience* [formerly level 2],
3. the intentional *object* of the experience [formerly level 1].<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 200. For a study of these levels of time with respect to the issue of novelty, see my article 'The Issue of Novelty in Husserl's Analysis of Absolute Time-Constituting Consciousness,' *Philosophy Today* 62, no. 3 (2017) 969-987.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas M. Seebohm, *Hermeneutics. Method and Methodology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2004), p. 99. The very ability of consciousness to reflect upon itself presupposes this living present of absolute consciousness, as 'a standing abiding structure'. This is why this structure is not an act of reflection itself since reflection presupposes it. Thus, as Seebohm correctly points out and distinguishes 'protention and retention have nothing in common with expectation and memory or remembering. The latter are indeed activities of the subject, but such activities themselves occur within the pre-given formal temporal framework. This formal structure of the three mutually founded abstract moments is a standing, abiding structure'. Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, p. 77.

<sup>83</sup> Brough, 'Notes on the Absolute Time-Constituting Flow of Consciousness', p. 23; Edmund Husserl, *Phantasie, Bildbewusstsein, Erinnerung: Zur Phänomenologie der anschaulichen Vergegenwärtigungen*, ed. by Eduard Marbach (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980), p. 326.

Whatever terminology is employed, the discovery of this most basic level of time-consciousness means that in order to make good on his aim of seizing upon and verifying the absolute foundation and origin of all givenness and knowledge, Husserl must perform the reduction once more.<sup>84</sup> Husserl must lead us back to this final absolute, to this living present, to this origin of time, which Kant regarded as the ‘hidden art [...] of the human soul’,<sup>85</sup> and proceed to bring it before our reflective regard in its absolute givenness. Because of this, in his later work, Husserl calls for a reduction to the living present, to ‘the sphere of primal temporalization, in which the first and primally welling sense of time comes forward’, as ‘the most radical reduction to that subjectivity in which everything that is valid for me originally accomplishes itself’.<sup>86</sup> As Sokolowski notes, only once this has been done can he ‘say that he has truly founded the possibility of his rigorous science, and established a base of final apodicticity for philosophy as he conceives it’.<sup>87</sup>

## 2.5 ABSOLUTE TIME-CONSTITUTING CONSCIOUSNESS

To fully understand how the form of absolute consciousness makes it possible for conscious life to constitute and know its immanent temporal acts (i.e. the experiences of subjectivity) and their corresponding transcendent objects, we need to clarify this basic

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<sup>84</sup> De Warren also makes this point in *Husserl and the Promise of Time*, p. 29.

<sup>85</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 273.

<sup>86</sup> Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologischen Reduktion*, p. 187.

<sup>87</sup> Sokolowski, *The Formation of Husserl's Concept of Constitution*, p. 200. It is of importance, nonetheless, that Husserl had already (and only) discovered and so established the apodictic basis to his investigations in his analysis of ‘[reflective] immanent perception’ in the reduction. He never relinquished this starting-point in his definition of phenomenology.



form, this hidden art of the soul, and to understand how it functions. Husserl refers to the primal synthesis (i.e. flow) of absolute time-constituting consciousness as the living present. Importantly, this living present is characterised by Husserl as an extended present.<sup>88</sup> That is to say, there is a certain transcendence at the heart of the immanence of the living present — i.e. a transcendence-in-immanence. Rather than being a discrete unit, then, the living present has a width; it consists in ‘pointing beyond itself’ — i.e. as intentional.<sup>89</sup>

While Husserl does at times describe *hyletic* data, considered abstractly in itself, as non-intentional, and as only becoming intentional by virtue of its connection with a chain of retentions, it is important to remember that, in his view, *hyletic* data ultimately does not occur in isolation but always together with a chain of retentions.<sup>90</sup> In his eyes, the primal impression does not occur as a pure now that stands outside its relation to retention and protention — as the just-elapsed and just-coming phases of time — which then proceed to contaminate and negate the pure now. Instead, both retention and protention are present as moments of the primal flow. Far from contaminating the pure now, retention and protention make it possible. As Alweiss correctly notes, the primal impression can only ever appear ‘within the tension of retentions and protentions’.<sup>91</sup> The pure now only ever appears as exceeding the moment, as pointing beyond itself, and so as extended, modified and adumbrated. For Husserl, then, there is no unextended or isolated now. The now is but an abstraction, something ideal.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Husserl, *Die Bernauer Manuskripte*, p. 62; Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, p. 27.

<sup>89</sup> Alweiss, *The World Unclaimed*, p. 41.

<sup>90</sup> Husserl, *Die Bernauer Manuskripte*, p. 62; Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, p. 27.

<sup>91</sup> Alweiss, *The World Unclaimed*, p. 44.

<sup>92</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, p. 51.

As such, the living present is a pre-temporal event, which has a tripartite form consisting of primordial impression-retention-protention.<sup>93</sup> The primordial impression serves as the momentary phase of actualisation, which is distinct and yet inseparable from the just-elapsed-phase (retention) and the just-coming-phase (protention).<sup>94</sup> It is this primal impression (i.e. sensuous *hyle*) that initiates the primal temporalising process of absolute consciousness, and so, it is viewed by Husserl as ‘the primal source of all further consciousness and being’.<sup>95</sup> As Mensch notes, Husserl maintains that while consciousness can generate retentions and protentions, it does not produce the primal impression, which must always be received from outside itself.<sup>96</sup> Meanwhile, as Husserl views it, retention perceives the just-elapsed phase of the flow of absolute consciousness (level one), as well as the past of the experience (level two), and that of the object (level three). In this sense, retention presents the past in a direct, original way.<sup>97</sup> As its ‘counterpart’, protention similarly presents the phase of time that is just entering the now-phase in a direct and original manner.<sup>98</sup> Together, these moments constitute the living present as a continuous deferral from one phase of time to another.<sup>99</sup> In doing so, they mark out its structural form as a continuous (primal) change, as a continuous running-off or differential repetition (i.e. self-differentiation).<sup>100</sup> With the arrival of each

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<sup>93</sup> Husserl, *Die Bernauer Manuskripte*, p. 37.

<sup>94</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70

<sup>96</sup> James Mensch, ‘Retention and The Schema’, in *On Time: New Contributions to the Husserlian Phenomenology of Time*, ed. by Dieter Lohmar and Ichiro Yamaguchi (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), pp. 153-168 (p. 159).

<sup>97</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 308-309, 338; Husserl, *Die Bernauer Manuskripte*, pp. 34–35.

<sup>99</sup> For more on the relation between retention and protention, see *Die Bernauer Manuskripte*, pp. 25, 29–30.

<sup>100</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, pp. 27, 49, 375.

new impression, protentions are actualised and become retentions, while prior retentions sink further and further into the past. That is to say, those just-elapsed phases that continue to motivate and have some bearing on conscious life (i.e. near retention) sink further into the background and become far retentions, which, in Husserl's view, continue to have an effect on passive associations, but which do so in a way that tends to go unnoticed.<sup>101</sup> The living present may thus be seen as a 'comet's tail', with all of its intertwined dimensions continuously modifying and motivating one another.<sup>102</sup>

That being said, this description of the form of the living present as a 'primal change' should not confuse us into viewing it as a temporal process.<sup>103</sup> While this primal change gives rise to temporality, it is not itself a temporal flow, understood as 'a continuous succession of objects'.<sup>104</sup> As Husserl writes elsewhere, the primal impressions, retentions and protentions of the absolute flow are 'objectivities fundamentally different from those constituted in time. They are neither individual objects, nor individual processes, and the predicates of such objects or processes cannot be meaningfully ascribed to them'.<sup>105</sup> This indicates that 'the constituting phenomena have an ontological sense that is different than that of the object they constitute'.<sup>106</sup>

As such, Husserl describes the absolute flow as pre-temporal, pre-individual and anonymous (i.e. inexperienceable, unsayable) level of sense.<sup>107</sup> Since the absolute flow

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 371; Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, pp. 514-515.

<sup>102</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, pp. 37, 306, 389.

<sup>103</sup> Brough, 'Notes on the Absolute Time-Constituting Flow', p. 32.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. Husserl regards not only transcendent things but also immanent acts or unities of subjective time as objects.

<sup>105</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>106</sup> Mensch, 'Retention and the Schema', p. 160.

<sup>107</sup> Brough, 'Notes on the Absolute Time-Constituting Flow', p. 32.

is not temporally constituted (i.e. pre-temporal), and so, cannot bear the attributes of our individual acts or experiences in subjective time (i.e. pre-individual), Husserl maintains that we ultimately cannot speak about or experience the anonymous sense that is pre-constituted by the primal flow, since to speak of it in a statement would be to ontify it; it would make it into an object in time and thus falsify it.<sup>108</sup> Hence his claim that, for this primal flow, and for everything that goes on therein, ‘we have no names’.<sup>109</sup>

For all that, although Husserl’s account of the absolute flow as pre-temporal requires that he employ language that does not evoke ‘common temporal predicates’, he is often obliged to do so. As Brough states, ‘[i]t is interesting that when Husserl applies temporal language to the flow, he often engages in something resembling negative theology or even the analogical predication of Aquinas. For example, he refers to the absolute flow as “primal change”. Now change is ordinarily a mark of the temporal, but Husserl immediately cautions that this primal change “is not in any time”, although “time first of all originates in it”’.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, ‘[h]is frequent use of prefixes — “quasi-”, “pre-”, “primal”, and so on — also alerts the reader not to take the terms to which they are attached in their usual sense.’<sup>111</sup>

However, as Michel Henry himself will notice, this seems to pose a serious problem for Husserl’s phenomenology. There may be structural or logical reasons for positing the necessity of an absolute flow. Yet, as we know, the aim of phenomenology is not to posit a logical beginning out of necessity but to return to the things themselves as they reveal themselves. If the primal flow cannot be in some way experienced, then

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<sup>108</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, p. 382.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Brough, ‘Notes on the Absolute Time-Constituting Flow’, p. 32.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

it would seem that transcendental phenomenology should not even be speaking of it. So, does the subject not experience the absolute flow in some way or other? Assuming it does, can this primal flow be revealed in apperceptive objectification (i.e. absolute givenness)? And if not, what ramifications would this hold for our understanding of constitution at this fundamental level? We will return to these issues shortly.

In order to understand how, on Husserl's view, this flow makes it possible for objectivity to arise for consciousness, let us continue to try and clarify the flow for ourselves.

As pre-temporal, the absolute flow is 'not something in time that could properly be said to appear in the modes of now, past, and future.'<sup>112</sup> The absolute flow does not consist in a series of sporadic acts that begin and end, and that 'can move from change to rest and from rest to change, and can change more quickly or more slowly.'<sup>113</sup> As Brough points out,

[e]vents, immanent or transcendent, can begin, accelerate, slow down, and end, which the primal process as continuous, unvarying flowing cannot do. The 'primal process is process, but no longer constituted in the same way as the objects belonging to immanent time'. The flow abides, and its 'standing signifies being constant as "process" — the process of primal temporalization'. The absolute consciousness flows but never finally flows away, never begins and ends as an individual act does. It is always there.<sup>114</sup>

Since the primal flow is always there, without individual acts that begin or end, it is viewed by Husserl as an infinite flux, as an endless chain of retentions, whose streaming always maintains the same form and speed. The primal change of the living present is thus an invariant form, which continuously abides throughout all of the changing, individual experiences in subjective time and their corresponding transcendent objects.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 46; Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, p. 370.

Husserl describes the invariant form of the flow in paradoxical terms as a standing-streaming, as a ‘fixed but flowing now’ — i.e. as a continuous change.<sup>115</sup> Viewed ‘in abstraction from what fills it [i.e. experiences in subjective time and their corresponding contents], the form of the flow is not flowing. It is “standing”. On the other hand, it never actually exists without being filled, and “the filled form, that is, the primal phenomenon, is flowing”’.<sup>116</sup> Drawing a helpful image from William James, Dan Zahavi notes that the absolute flow can be described as standing ‘permanent like a rainbow on a waterfall, its own quality unchanged by the events that stream through it’.<sup>117</sup> In other words, the primal flow stands as the experiencing of life, which remains constant throughout all of the individual experiences that stream through it.

This fixed but flowing form is seen by Husserl as distinct and yet inseparable from the immanent temporal acts that stream through it — the flow (i.e. experiencing) and its acts (subjective experiences) being distinct yet inseparable moments in one and the same flow of consciousness.<sup>118</sup> The primal flow is distinct in that, as the final and true absolute foundation of all life and being [i.e. intelligibility], it constitutes itself and all objects, whether immanent (i.e. subjective time) or transcendent (i.e. objective time), and so, it does not require some deeper level to give rise to it.<sup>119</sup> As Husserl writes,

[a]s shocking (when not initially even absurd) as it may seem to say that the flow of consciousness constitutes *its own unity*, it is nonetheless the case that it does. And this can be made intelligible on the basis of the flow’s essential constitution. Our regard can be directed, in the one case, through the phases that ‘coincide’ in

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<sup>115</sup> Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität: Dritter Teil: 1929-1935*, p. 670.

<sup>116</sup> Brough, ‘Notes on the Absolute Time-Constituting Flow’, p. 47.

<sup>117</sup> Dan Zahavi, ‘Inner (Time-)Consciousness’, in *On Time: New Contributions to the Husserlian Phenomenology of Time*, ed. by Dieter Lohmar and Ichiro Yamaguchi (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), pp. 341-339 (p. 335).

<sup>118</sup> John B. Brough, ““The Most Difficult of all Phenomenological Problems””, *Husserl Studies* 27, no. 1 (2011), 27-40 (p. 31).

<sup>119</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, p. 381.

the continuous progression of the flow and that function as intentionalities of the tone. But our regard can also be aimed at the flow, at a section of the flow, at the passage of the flowing consciousness from the beginning of the tone to the end.<sup>120</sup>

Throughout all of the objectifying acts in which consciousness is directed toward things, the primal flow thus constitutes its own unity and appearing as a pre-memorial, pre-reflective and non-objectifying awareness of itself.

At the same time, the absolute flow is inseparable from the succession of our mental states in that the pre-reflective self-awareness of the former never occurs apart from the temporal occurrences of the latter. Consciousness is, therefore, its acts, but, as our conscious lives are founded upon this pre-reflective self-awareness that remains constant throughout all of the temporal changes of our lives, it is also ‘more than its acts’.<sup>121</sup> Brough captures the distinction between the absolute flow and subjective time in an especially compelling way when he writes:

[t]he flow is that dimension of my conscious being that is irreducible to my acts. To be aware of myself as something more than my particular acts, more even than the total flow of acts, is [...] to be aware of the flow. Again, that awareness is not of the flow as an object that is or could be isolated from its acts. The awareness of the flow is a kind of constant presence attending my acts, or, better, haunting them. It shows itself in my awareness of the continuity of my ongoing conscious life. I do not experience my flowing consciousness as exhausted by the acts that now fill it or have filled it or will fill it. The flow is no more the sum of its acts than the sea is the sum of its waves; and just as there are no waves without the sea, there are no acts without the flow.<sup>122</sup>

Another way of putting this would be to say that the flow is the continuous experiencing (i.e. a pre-memorial, pre-reflective self-awareness) of conscious life, which makes possible, and so, cannot be exhausted by the individual experiences that come and go over the course of our lives, including acts of remembering and expectation themselves.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., pp. 214-215, my emphasis. In his analysis of our experience of time, Brentano could only find unity in the present time, the hearing of a tone, not unity over and through time as Husserl does in the hearing and having heard a tone.

<sup>121</sup> Brough, “The Most Difficult of all Phenomenological Problems”, p. 36.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., pp. 36-37.

As distinct yet inseparable from the immanent temporal objects that pass through it, Husserl finds that the primal flow — especially through its retentive phase — functions as ‘a double intentionality’.<sup>123</sup> He refers to the retentive consciousness of the elapsed segments of the flow as the flow’s ‘horizontal intentionality’, and the retentive consciousness that is directed toward the elapsed segments of the immanent object as the flow’s ‘transverse intentionality’.<sup>124</sup> Because of this, when absolute consciousness retains the elapsed segment of the flow, which is originally directed toward a segment of an object as now by way of its primal impression, it also retains the elapsed segment of the object that is correlated with it.<sup>125</sup> And since each retained segment of the flow itself harbours a retentive consciousness, that retentive consciousness, and the segment of the object that is correlated with it, are conserved as well, and so on.<sup>126</sup>

In this way, it is the primal flow that makes it possible for us to have an awareness of the succession of our mental states, and to thereby order and measure objects in objective time. It is this pre-memorial self-awareness that, in providing us with a fixed place amidst the succession of subjective time, centres our life and provides it with constancy, and thereby makes it possible for us to unify and apprehend our changing temporal experiences as such. The primal change of the living present ‘lets us journey in time, backward in memory to what we have lived through and forward in expectation to what we anticipate as coming. If consciousness did not flow, there would be nothing to remember or expect; but if it were not constant, if it did not “stand”, there could be no remembering or expecting’, and so, no ordering of objects in objective time as existing

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<sup>123</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, p. 390.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 391-392.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.



in themselves.<sup>127</sup> At heart, then, it is this peculiar form of the living present that makes it possible for reflection and objectivity to arise for consciousness. The living present makes possible the constitution of subjective time (i.e. the experiences of subjectivity) and our perception of objects as existing in themselves.

## 2.6 THE MYSTERY OF INNER TIME-CONSCIOUSNESS

The fundamental question that remains is whether transcendental time-constituting consciousness, as the hidden art (or inner nature) of the soul, can be experienced and ultimately perceived by our reflective gaze? Can Husserl's phenomenology, which understands absolute self-givenness in terms of objective awareness allow the primordial ego to appear in a clear and immediate way? Does it sufficiently clarify what this primordial ego is and how it functions? As Henry reminds us, unless the appearing of transcendental subjectivity has been adequately clarified, the entire project of phenomenology is effectively threatened.<sup>128</sup> As Zahavi writes, 'not only would its own preferred *reflective* methodology remain unaccounted for and obscure, but without an adequate understanding of self-manifestation, its detailed analysis of act-intentionality and object-manifestation would also lack a proper foundation, and phenomenology would consequently be incapable of realising its own proper task, namely to provide a clarification of the condition of possibility for manifestation'.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Brough, "The Most Difficult of all Phenomenological Problems", p. 39.

<sup>128</sup> Michel Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, trans. by Scott Davidson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 26, 31.

<sup>129</sup> Dan Zahavi, 'Michel Henry and the Phenomenology of the Invisible', *Continental Philosophy Review* 32, no. 3 (1999), 223-240 (p. 225).

We have seen how inner time-consciousness functions as a pre-reflective, non-objectifying self-awareness. And yet Husserl also describes this pre-reflective experiencing of our experiences as inexperiencable and unsayable. How, if at all, do we square these accounts? While Husserl is often rather less than clear on this matter, to the extent that we undergo this primal flow, it is reasonable to suppose that it must be experienced in some way — i.e. in a pre-reflective and non-objectifying manner. In that case, it may well be that the primal flow is ‘inexperiencable’ simply in the sense that it can be experienced neither on a reflective level nor adequately captured in speech. Hence, it remains a ‘pure — and, so to speak — still dumb [...] experience’, as Husserl elsewhere describes it.<sup>130</sup>

Yet we know that Husserl cannot be satisfied with this. Rather than simply posit a logical beginning, one that needs to be thought but which cannot be manifested, Husserl’s phenomenology is distinguished, in part, by its claim to be able to manifest this hidden art of the soul. In his early time-lectures, we find Husserl stating that the subject does ‘know of the flow of consciousness as flow’, that she ‘can look at it’.<sup>131</sup> As Jeremy Smith points out, ‘Husserl says of the “pure I” that “as an absolute given, that is, as that which can be brought to givenness in a regard that fixes [an object] in reflection, a regard that is possible a priori, there is nothing at all mysterious or mystical about it”, explicitly equating the givenness of “I” to its presence to reflection, or at least to its ability to be made present to reflection’.<sup>132</sup> Indeed, Husserl believes that ‘[e]very intellectual experience, indeed every experience whatsoever, can be made into an object of

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<sup>130</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 38.

<sup>131</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, p. 389.

<sup>132</sup> Smith, ‘Michel Henry’s Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience and Husserlian Intentionality’, p. 193; Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Volume II*, ed. by Marly Biemel (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952), p. 97.

*pure seeing and apprehension* while it is occurring'.<sup>133</sup> Elsewhere, he states that it is because the I lives-through its experiences — i.e. because it has a pre-reflective awareness of them — that I can become conscious of such experiences via reflection. As he writes, '[a]ny mental process which is not an object of regard can, with respect to ideal possibility, become "regarded;" a reflection on the part of the Ego is directed to it, it now becomes an object *for* the Ego.'<sup>134</sup> Thus Husserl subscribes to the Lockean-Humean transparency thesis of the mind; that is, that the mind has access directly to itself and all its operations that can be 'seen'. This, however, assumes a dualistic metaphysics of human subjectivity, of a lucid mind and opaque body. Commenting on this passage from Husserl, Alweiss notes that '[t]here is thus an *Erlebnisreflexion* that is dif-

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<sup>133</sup> Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, p. 24. Along these lines, Husserl also states that I can 'see this act of seeing itself'. Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 174. This dualistic theoretical metaphysics of human subjectivity will be challenged, on phenomenological grounds, by existential phenomenologists who start from the experiential unity of mind and body, the conscious body, that cannot be separated without distortion of the reality of individual human existence as experienced.

ferent from the reflection on the immanent object, since it purely makes manifest an awareness that already is.<sup>135</sup> In Husserl's words,

[t]his occurs in the form of '*reflection*', which has the remarkable property that what is seized upon perceptually in reflection is characterized fundamentally not only as something which exists and endures while it is being regarded perceptually but also as something which *already existed before* this regard was turned to it. 'All mental processes are intended to': This signifies, then, that in the specific case of intensive mental processes not only are they consciousness of something and present as consciousness of something when they themselves are the Objects of a reflecting consciousness, but also that they are there already as a 'background' when they are not reflected on and thus of essential necessity are 'ready to be perceived'.<sup>136</sup>

Though the primal flow is prior to any perceptual act, since we live-through the primal flow, Husserl believes that it can be seized upon by our perceptual regard.

In these very same time-lectures, though, Husserl does come to realise that this absolute foundation can never be entirely seized upon. He comes to see that '[t]he constituting and the constituted coincide, and yet naturally they cannot coincide in every respect. The phases of the flow of consciousness in which phases of the same flow of

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<sup>135</sup> Alweiss, *The World Unclaimed*, p. 67. Husserl, however, does distinguish the unity that is present in one concrete '*cogitatio*' of an act of (reflective) immanent perception of a currently lived experience from the ability of consciousness to reflect upon other things (whether such be things given to acts of outer perceptual sense-experience or a memory). These unities within consciousness must also be distinguished from the kind of infinite unity of reflection on finite acts of experiences — the idea in the Kantian sense — that Husserl also identifies as a peculiar unity within human consciousness. See Husserl, *Ideas I*, §83, 'Seizing Upon the Unitary Stream of Experiences as "Idea",' (pp. 197–199). Husserl, therefore, does not confuse (or compare) the incompleteness characteristic of thing-perception with the incompleteness characteristic of the idea of the infinity of reflection on acts as Alweiss suggests, when she comments, '[i]n immanent experience we are faced with an incompleteness that does not occlude the co-appearance of that which appears in its failure to appear, which in turn is fully present [i.e. the idea of infinity of such acts for reflection transcendently deduced]. In [reflective] immanent experience the infinite fulfilled stream of intentions is fully present despite the incompleteness of the adumbrating nature of lived experiences [i.e. that are characteristic of outer perceptual-sense experiences of things]'. *Ibid.*, p. 32. Given the lack of distinctions by this author that are eminently present in Husserl's thought, this commentator, as McDonnell remarks, 'has no alternative but to conclude: "Reading *Ideen I* [...] we fail to understand *how* these claims have come about. How can we simultaneously see incompleteness and completeness?"'. Cyril McDonnell, 'Husserl's Critique of Brentano's Doctrine of Inner Perception and its Significance for Understanding Husserl's Method in Phenomenology', in *Maynooth Philosophical Papers* 6 (2011), 74–111 (p. 101-102, n. 110). Contrary to Alweiss, nonetheless, 'we can *see how* these claims do come about, and *understand* them, if we distinguish, as Husserl does, between: (1) the incompleteness that is characteristic of thing-perception; (2) the complete unity between perception and its object (which is here an *Erlebnis*) in an act of reflective immanent perception; and (3) the deduction, on the basis of the *recognition* of the finiteness of the knowledge-claim of immanent perception *as finite*, of the idea of infinity for reflection on experiences by the transcendental (intellectual, and not sense) imagination.' *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>136</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 98-99.

consciousness become constituted phenomenally cannot be identical with these constituted phases, nor are they.’<sup>137</sup> If this is the case, then while we may be able to describe aspects of the primal flow to some extent, it can never be grasped as a whole. Indeed, insofar as the primal flow functions as a continuous change, Husserl’s phenomenological description of the flow suggests that reflection can never grasp the event of the primordial ego in its actual occurrence as the source of conscious life, but only after it has slid into the past as an object. The moment our reflective regard is brought to bear on the primal flow it has already changed and become another, that is to say, it has become the performance of the act of reflection. Therefore, the act of constituting — i.e. the primal flow — can never be given absolutely.<sup>138</sup>

In the eyes of Husserl, the pre-temporal event of consciousness is only given as a Kantian idea. As he writes in *Ideas I*, ‘[i]n the continuous progression from seizing-upon to seizing-upon, in a certain way, I said, we now seize upon the *stream of mental processes as a unity*. We do not seize upon it as we do a single mental process but rather in the manner of an *idea in the Kantian sense*.’<sup>139</sup> Husserl contends that this ideal appears as such in the interplay of the chain of retentions and protentions.<sup>140</sup> On his account, then, the absolute foundation of the transcendental ego only ever appears as an ideal that can never be realized, and which exists only in being infinitely deferred. Husserl believes that it is this idea of perfect givenness that directs perceptual consciousness and which is anticipated in each appearance, thereby motivating the phe-

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<sup>137</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, p. 88.

<sup>138</sup> Michel Henry makes this point in *Material Phenomenology*, pp. 25, 27-29, 31, 37, 48. Cf. also Alweiss, *The World Unclaimed*, p. 70; and Klaus Held, *Lebendige Gegenwart: Die Frage nach der Seinweise des Transzendentalen Ich bei Edmund Husserl, Entwickelt am Leitfaden der Zeitproblematik* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1966).

<sup>139</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 197.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 342-343.

nomenologist onto infinite progress. As such, the possibility of reflectively seizing upon the absolute totality of the stream of consciousness functions as a regulative ideal in Husserl's thought.<sup>141</sup>

Despite the unwavering commitment of his phenomenology to an idealization of intuition and presence, Husserl's phenomenological descriptions of this absolute consciousness lead him to ask whether this does not force us to admit that the ultimate foundation of transcendental subjectivity must consist in an unconscious domain:

[b]ut now we ask whether we must not say that there is, in addition, an *ultimate consciousness* that controls all consciousness in the flow. In that case, the phase of internal consciousness that is *actual* at any particular moment would be something intended through the ultimate consciousness; and it would be this ultimate consciousness that passes over into the reproductive (retentional) modification, which itself would then be something again intended in the ultimate consciousness. This ultimate intentionality can take up into itself the style of paying attention, and in this way we can become conscious of its content in the manner of the object of attention. We find, moreover, that when we do pay attention to something, something is always already 'appearing' — the style of attention always runs through and across an intentionality. But if I direct my regard towards an actual momentary phase of the flow? But we should seriously consider whether we must assume such an ultimate consciousness, which would necessarily be an 'unconscious' consciousness; that is to say, as ultimate intentionality it cannot be an object of attention (if paying attention always presupposes intentionality already given in advance), and therefore it can never become conscious in this particular sense.<sup>142</sup>

If the absolute foundation is unconscious, then it would be *fundamentally impossible* for it to *ever* be brought to the clear light of day (i.e. *to* consciousness). It would be necessary to acknowledge that the immanence of consciousness is not an absolute, self-contained field, but is always already ruptured by an unconscious life that precedes it and

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, p. 394. In his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874), Brentano has ruled out any 'hypothesis of the unconscious' in his idea of a descriptive psychology because this science relies on direct (= non-hypothetical), *a priori*, intuitive knowledge of consciousness itself and its operations. See *PES*, Book II, Section II Inner Consciousness (pp. 101–137). Husserl is well aware of this position and embraces it himself in his appeal to intuition as the source for all knowledge about *consciousness itself*. For Husserl, following Brentano, whatever is in consciousness must be, if not consciously perceived, 'ready to be perceived'.

which makes it possible, and which forever exceeds intuition and presence.

However, within these early time-lectures, Husserl ultimately rejects this position. As he writes,

[i]t is just nonsense to talk about an ‘unconscious’ content that would only subsequently become conscious. Consciousness is necessarily *consciousness* in each of its phases. Just as the retentional phase is conscious of the preceding phase without making it into an object, so too the primal datum is already intended — specifically, in the original form of the ‘now’ — without its being something objective. It is precisely this primal consciousness that passes over into retentional modification — which is then retention of the primal consciousness itself and of the datum originally intended in it, since the two are inseparably united. If the primal consciousness were not at hand, no retention would even be conceivable: retention of an unconscious content is impossible.<sup>143</sup>

Husserl remains reluctant to accept the unconscious ground of life that his own analyses point toward.<sup>144</sup> Insofar as the event of consciousness functions ‘as a differential repetition, a repetition in which, for the first time and after the fact [i.e. post-factually], the consciousness of the now becomes conscious of itself’, the ultimate foundation of the primal self appears to function as a past that has never been given as present, as an unconscious life that exceeds intuition and presence.<sup>145</sup> As we have already seen, though, because the subject lives-through the elapsed phases of the flow, Husserl believes that it is possible for the subject to reflectively perceive the flow, and that, as he writes, ‘[t]hese acts stand to retention by way of fulfilment.’<sup>146</sup> As Rudolf Bernet correctly notes, ‘[t]his is a metaphysical assertion, for it defines the retentional self-appearance of the flow privatively as a merely provisional datum, teleologically aligned toward the

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<sup>143</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, p. 123.

<sup>144</sup> That being said, even in his late work, Husserl appears to remain somewhat hesitant as to where to stand on this issue. As Bernet notes, ‘[e]ven in the Bernauer manuscripts (L I 21, 1917), Husserl seems still to be tempted to put up with this inconvenience and, against all his principles, to grant the existence of an “unconscious” consciousness of time’ — though he never does. Rudolf Bernet, ‘Is the Present Ever Present? Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Presence’, *Research in Phenomenology* 12, no. 1 (1982), 85-112 (p. 101).

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>146</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, p. 122.

reflective *perception* of the retained flow.’<sup>147</sup> As Bernet goes on, these very ‘same metaphysical prejudices’ prevent Husserl from fully appreciating the consequences of ‘the post-factuality of the retentional self-appearance of the flow’.<sup>148</sup> They lead him to contend that ‘only that can be post-factual which was initially given in present actuality’.<sup>149</sup> Despite this, and however inadvertently, Husserl’s own analyses suggest that this is not the case, and that there is an unconscious life that founds and exceeds the immanence of consciousness. Husserl’s conception of phenomenology as a rigorous science that affords primacy to intuition and presence thus ultimately falls at the hands of a life that forever exceeds its grasp.

Yet, if we accept this, then how should transcendental phenomenology proceed in light of these developments? Should it simply concede that this ultimate foundation, this hidden art of the soul, cannot in any way be given absolutely? Should the philosopher endeavour to give up the seemingly deep-rooted desire to achieve an absolute knowledge of things in their perfect givenness? Is it even possible to overcome this desire? What is more, there is the lingering issue or question as to who or what this primordial self actually is. Should we understand its innermost nature to be conscious or unconscious? And, of no less importance, how, if at all, is it bound to the human being and the human ego? Finally, given that, at its most fundamental level, the synthesis of the primal flow yields an anonymous sense that cannot be captured or understood in terms of apperceptive objectification (i.e. sense-bestowal), it would seem that the constitution of meaning cannot merely be a matter of sense-bestowal. If the most fundamental level of constitution cannot be construed in this way, then how should it be un-

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<sup>147</sup> Bernet, ‘Is the Present Ever Present?’, p. 109.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*



derstood? In light of the above considerations, Bernet himself suggests that the task that falls to phenomenology, ‘in place of an objectifying mirroring of the visible, [is] to search for the “wanting names” of those phenomena which cannot be named in the language of reflective phenomenology’. In his eyes, ‘[t]hough he prefigured it’, owing to his ‘demand for a *reflective objectification* of the phenomena constituting time-consciousness’, Husserl ‘himself never walked this path consistently’.<sup>150</sup> By what name should this basic level of constitution be called? While Husserl’s work forces all of these questions upon us, it does not offer a clear or compelling response. It will thus be necessary to look elsewhere to develop further clarity on these issues.

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE PRODUCTIVE FORCE OF LIFE:

#### HENRY'S IMMANENT CRITIQUE OF HUSSERL

Henry's work can be understood as a search for the 'wanting names' of transcendental subjectivity. Indeed, he contends that not only Husserl's intentional phenomenology, but much of the history of Western thought, has failed to provide an adequate account of the nature — or way of appearing or 'living' (*vivant*), to use Henry's terminology — of the subject and how it functions. Despite his critical stance toward the history of philosophy, Henry nevertheless identifies a rare few thinkers who serve as precursors to his own work, and whose writings at least begin to gesture toward the radically immanent, non-intentional and affective appearing of life that, in his eyes, stands as the hidden art of the soul, which the history of Western thought has generally overlooked.<sup>1</sup> The work of René Descartes figures prominently amongst those rare few. In Descartes' initial insights into the being of the subject (*cogito*) — what Henry calls 'beginning Cartesianism' — Henry believes he finds one of the more concrete and compelling arguments for upholding that the subject exists in a radically immanent and affective manner.

This chapter, therefore, will first approach Henry's thought through his reading of Descartes. Doing so will allow us to familiarise ourselves with one of the principle arguments that Henry sees as pointing toward the radically immanent and affective manner in which the subject appears or experiences itself. Despite this, however, Henry maintains that Descartes does not fully recognise or develop the phenomenological life

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<sup>1</sup> As Kevin Hart notes, '[f]or Husserl, [hyle] and [noesis] are moments of a phenomenon, although the noetic is prized over the hyletic because it is an intentional rapport with something imagined or real, inner or outer. Accordingly, he emphasizes the noetic side of phenomenology. Can one develop the other [i.e. hyletic, affective] side? That is Henry's question.' Kevin A. Hart, 'Spiritual Acoustics: On Being in Common (Kierkegaard, Husserl, Henry)', *Analecta-Hermeneutica* 8 (2016), 310-330 (pp. 325-326).

of the subject that his own descriptions of the *cogito* point toward. In proceeding to lay out Henry's development of the transcendental life of the subject, our aim will be to draw attention to the way in which his work helps us provide a more adequate account of the nature of the subject, and of the way in which the individual is able to obtain absolute knowledge of the ultimate foundation of her being.

### 3.1 HENRY, HUSSERL AND DESCARTES

Henry's critical reading of Husserl centres around the latter's treatment of the immanence of the subject. While Henry regards Husserl's *Lectures on the Consciousness of Internal Time* as the most important and 'beautiful work of twentieth century philosophy',<sup>2</sup> he maintains that Husserl fails to examine the immanence of the primordial ego in a sufficiently pure manner.<sup>3</sup> In his eyes, though Husserl's work contains '[t]he brilliant insight that every act and every lived experience is an impression',<sup>4</sup> he ultimately does not do justice to his initial insight into the sensual *hyle* of experience as the 'primal source of all further consciousness and being'.<sup>5</sup> According to Henry, Husserl fails to do justice to hyletic data inasmuch as he fails to grasp it in its radical immanence, as a non-intentional and non-objectifying mode of appearing — i.e. the self-manifestation of the pure ego — and instead makes it conform to the transcendence (i.e. intentional struc-

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<sup>2</sup> Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 21.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Henry, 'Philosophie et subjectivité', in *Encyclopédie Philosophique Universelle, Volume 1: L'univers philosophique*, ed. by André Jacob (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989), pp. 46-56 (p. 50).

<sup>4</sup> Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, p. 35. As Husserl himself puts this, '[i]n a certain sense [...] all experiences are intended through impressions or are impressed'. Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, p. 93.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

ture) of the primal flow. In so doing, Henry believes that Husserl reduces all appearing to that of object-manifestation.

This is what Henry refers to as ‘ontological monism’: the assumption that there is only one mode of appearing, namely, the ecstatic, transcendent appearing of the world, or object-manifestation, understood as the appearance of an object to our perceptual gaze. Indeed, in a sweeping interpretation of the history of Western thought, Henry claims that the course of Western philosophy has been largely guided by this ontological monism. As a result, for all the attention it has paid the matter, Western thought has still yet to provide an adequate account of who or what the subject is and how it functions.

That being said, it should be acknowledged that Henry is clearly mistaken in asserting that Husserl completely overlooks the pre-reflective and non-objectifying appearing of the subject. As we observed in the previous chapter, Husserl acknowledges that the primal self enjoys a continuous, pre-reflective and non-objectifying awareness of itself *in* all of its acts. Be that as it may, on Henry’s account, Husserl neither grasps its true nature — i.e. he does not treat it in a sufficiently pure manner — nor does he fully appreciate its importance in the subject’s constitution of itself and the world. Even though Husserl acknowledges the non-objectifying mode of appearing proper to the subject more than Henry admits, it is nevertheless true that there is a tendency in his thought to treat appearing largely in terms of object-manifestation, and thus to regard the role of sensuous hyle — i.e. affective, non-objectifying self-appearing — in the process of constitution as secondary to that of apperceptive objectification.<sup>6</sup>

In order to remedy this, Henry believes that it is not enough for the phenomenologist to simply bracket the intramundane contents of the world — i.e. ‘the empirical

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<sup>6</sup> Husserl, in other words, in his definition of phenomenology, begins with the view there are intended objects of experience, thus there are acts intending those objects; so, phenomenology, as far as Husserl is concerned, is both a regressive and correlative investigation into this ‘constitution’ of intended objects.

world and the psychological ego inscribed in it' — and relinquish our naive belief in them as fostered by the natural attitude.<sup>7</sup> To truly treat the immanence of the subject in a sufficiently pure manner, it is necessary to suspend or question the ecstatic appearing that opens and makes possible the light of the world to consciousness. We have to go one step back into and back behind, as it were, consciousness as understood from within the natural attitude. Henry believes that Descartes provides us with such a way, and, to the extent that this is the case, in doing so he provides us with a more adequate account of the independent and unique appearing of *the subject*.<sup>8</sup>

In this sense, the work of Descartes serves as something of a critical pivot-point between Husserl and Henry. Husserl famously critiques Descartes's account of the *cogito* as failing to establish *that* consciousness exists absolutely or *how* it is given in a fundamentally different way than transcendent objects in the world. In his eyes, Descartes's *cogito* remains a 'little *tag-end of the world*', and insofar as this is the case, 'his work falls short of establishing the independent and unique way in which the subject exists (i.e. its absolute existence).'<sup>9</sup> As far as Henry is concerned, however, it is Husserl who falls short of this goal more so than Descartes. By conceiving the immanence of the subject as a transcendence-in-immanence (i.e. as a primal flow) which opens up the world as an ecstatic horizon of visibility in light of which things can appear to us, Henry sees Husserl's understanding of transcendental subjectivity as still bound to the appearing of the world. Because of this, Henry maintains that Husserl fails to uncover the truly transcendental field of experience, to uncover the purely immanent

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<sup>7</sup> Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, p. 58.

<sup>8</sup> Michel Henry, 'The Critique of the Subject', in *Who Comes After The Subject?* ed. by Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor and Jean-Luc Nancy (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 157-166 (p. 157).

<sup>9</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 24.

realm that, as such, has no relation to the world or to anything outside itself, and which is therefore truly absolute, namely, the transcendental life of the living subject.

This is not to say, however, that Henry fully endorses Descartes's method as the sole, or even the primary path toward an insight into the absolute existence of the subject. Henry views Descartes as simply providing the phenomenologist with the means to begin to gain a theoretical understanding of the subject's radically immanent way of living.

### 3.2 THE IMMANENT APPEARING OF THE *COGITO*

Descartes's proof of the absolute existence of the *ego cogito* arises at the end of the termination of his process of methodological doubt, or what Henry calls his radical epoche. Let us briefly recall the nature of this procedure. In an effort to counter skepticism over certainty in any of our knowledge-claims and secure an unshakable (i.e. indubitable, certain) foundation for all appearance (i.e. being) and knowledge, Descartes tries to doubt everything: he doubts himself as a man who exists in the world; he doubts his eyes, legs, the ground on which he walks, as well as everything he sees and even the external world itself, which may be nothing more than an illusion.<sup>10</sup> But even if everything I see and think about can be doubted, there is one thing that cannot be: the existence of the doubter, my thinking itself — 'I think, therefore I am.' Everything can be doubted, with the exception of my self, as this thinking thing. As Descartes writes, '[a]t last I have discovered it — thought; this alone is inseparable from me. I am, I exist —

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<sup>10</sup> Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, p. 17.

that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking.’<sup>11</sup> In this way, Descartes’s radical *epoche* is said to demonstrate that the existence of the self as a thinking thing is the ultimate foundation of appearance and knowledge for which philosophy has always been searching.

Henry’s interpretation of Descartes’s account of the *cogito* (i.e. of the interconnectedness of thought, appearance, being) stands in marked contrast to the dominant view of the primary functioning of Descartes’s *cogito* as a matter of representational thinking, that is to say, as the posing of something before consciousness.<sup>12</sup> As far as Henry is concerned, Descartes himself is at least partially to blame for the prevalence of this short-sighted view in the secondary literature. Because Descartes did not fully understand or appreciate just what it is that his method of doubt stumbles upon, he eventually aligns the *cogito* with representation, and ultimately mistakes it as a *cogito me cogitare*, as a self-representation that accompanies all of my representations.<sup>13</sup> According to Henry, in ‘beginning Cartesianism’, it is not representational thinking that determines the way in which the subject exists and knows itself. If we actually inspect Descartes’s initial phenomenological descriptions of the *cogito*, what we find is that, at heart, thought is not reflexive or intentional, and so, it does not depend on or refer to anything

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<sup>11</sup> René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume 2*, trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> In the commonplace view, as evidenced in the work of Heidegger, the *cogito* is the locus of objectivity. The *cogito* is the model of representational thinking, which consists in placing something before our regard. To the extent that the *cogito* functions as the absolute ground of being, it effectively reduces everything that is to an object for a subject. What is more, contrary to Heidegger’s interpretation of Descartes’ account of the *cogito* as itself presupposing the being of the *cogito*, Henry points out that ‘Descartes does not say “I am”; he says “therefore I am.” Far from arising without presupposition, his affirmation results from the systematic elaboration [and *discovery*] of the indispensable prerequisite from which alone the proposition of being is possible. This prerequisite is nothing other than the appearance which Descartes calls “thought.” The determination of this prerequisite is the content of the *cogito*. “We are *only by virtue of the fact that we think* [*Nous sommes par cela seul que nous pensons*].” Michel Henry, ‘The Soul According to Descartes’, in *Essays on the Philosophy and Science of René Descartes*, ed. by Stephen Voss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 40-51 (p. 41).

<sup>13</sup> Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 44, 47. For more on this, see Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, trans. by Frank A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), pp. 104-106, 108. Cf. also Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, A355, A363.

*other than itself*. Therefore, what Descartes's methodological doubt really proves is that the existence of the self can be established with unshakeable certainty (i.e. in an absolutely clear and distinct way) without having to appeal to object-manifestation, which is to say, without having to appeal to anything outside ourselves (i.e. to a *cogitatum* or object of thought). Henry believes he finds evidence for this view in the following two passages:

The fact that it is I who am doubting and understanding and willing is so evident that I see no way of making it any clearer. But it is also the case that the 'I' who imagines is the same 'I.' For even if, as I have supposed, none of the objects of imagination are real, the power of imagination is something which really exists and is part of my thinking. Lastly, it is also the same 'I' who has sensory perceptions (*sentiens*), or is aware of bodily things as it were through the senses. For example, I am now seeing light, hearing a noise, feeling heat. But I am asleep, so all this is false. Yet I certainly *seem* to see, to hear, and to be warmed. This cannot be false; what is called 'having a sensory perception' is strictly just this, and in this restricted sense of the term it is simply thinking.<sup>14</sup>

Thus often when we sleep, and sometimes even when we are awake, we imagine certain things so forcibly, that we think we see them before us, or feel them in our body, although they do not exist at all; but although we may be asleep or dreaming, we cannot feel sad or moved by any other passion without its being very true that the soul actually has this passion within it [...] we may be mistaken therein regarding perceptions which relate to objects which are outside us, or at least those which relate to certain parts of our body, but that we cannot be so deceived regarding the passions, inasmuch as they are so close to, and so entirely within our soul, that it is impossible for it to feel them without their being actually such as it feels them to be.<sup>15</sup>

According to Henry, what these passages demonstrate is that, for one, even though what appears to me — that is, the content which appears in the light of the world — may be false, what cannot be doubted is my immediate (i.e. non-ecstatic) awareness — i.e.

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<sup>14</sup> Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume 2*, p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.



*videor*, thought, ‘it seems to me’.<sup>16</sup> When it seems to me that I am hearing or being warmed, I may be mistaken about the worldly content of my awareness, but I cannot be mistaken about the existence of my awareness itself.<sup>17</sup> Even when doubt forces us to cancel the validity of everything we see and all of our representations, the validity of our immediate self-awareness (i.e. self-appearing) remains. In this case, even without a *cogitatum*, even without an intentional object, this awareness occurs in a perfectly clear and distinct way.

One might be understandably confused by this account of awareness. If this awareness excludes any and all transcendence, and does not involve a relation to something other than the subject or thought, how should it be understood? Henry steps in here to try and lend some precision to the matter. As the subject’s primal self-awareness excludes ecstasis, it cannot be mediated by the ecstatic temporality of the world, and so, it occurs without delay.<sup>18</sup> And since this immediate self-awareness does not involve a relation to anything other than itself, it is also given non-horizontally. In the immediacy of its awareness, the subject is, as it were, ‘crushed up against itself’ at each point of its

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<sup>16</sup> In Henry’s view, Descartes’s account of the ‘[t]he *cogito* finds its ultimate formulation in the proposition ‘*videre videor*’ — it seems to me that I see [i.e. sensory awareness].’ Henry, ‘The Soul According to Descartes’, in *Science of René Descartes*, ed. by Voss, pp. 41-42. For Henry, the formulation that is equivalent to ‘*videre videor*’ in the Cartesianism of the beginning is ‘*sentimus nos videre*’ — ‘we are aware that we see’ — an assertion all the more interesting because Descartes makes it in the course of opposing the vision of animals, who properly speaking see nothing at all, to ‘human’ vision, that is, to actual vision, which thus does not consist only in *videre* but counts as such only if *sentimus nos videre*. Ibid., p. 43; René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume 3*, trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch and Anthony Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 61-62.

<sup>17</sup> Descartes expresses this point in another way in the following passage: ‘even though the objects of my sensory experience and imagination may have no existence outside me, nonetheless the modes of thinking which I refer to as cases of sensory perception and imagination, in so far as they are simply modes of thinking, do exist within me — of that I am certain’. Or again, ‘[b]ut when I see, or think I see (I am not here distinguishing the two), it is simply not possible that I who am now thinking am not something.’ Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume 2*, pp. 24, 22.

<sup>18</sup> As Henry writes, ‘[t]hought’s primal sensing is radically opposed to the sensing that rules seeing, hearing, touching, and even understanding (insofar as it is a seeing, *intueri*) [...]. Thought’s essential self-sensing is not merely different from ek-stasis; it excludes it, and precisely this exclusion determines the concept of immediacy.’ Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, p. 22.

being.<sup>19</sup> What we are left with, then, is a primal awareness in which we cannot ‘draw a distinction between the object of awareness and our awareness [itself]’.<sup>20</sup> To borrow Henry’s language, the subject is at once both appearing and what appears, without any distance or difference between the two. Therefore, prior to any reflective or objectifying relation to something beyond oneself, the subject already knows itself in this immanent, pre-reflective and non-objectifying self-awareness.

### 3.3 THE PRIMAL SENSING OF THOUGHT

We can perhaps make this account seem more tangible by highlighting the other implication of the above passages from Descartes, namely, that thinking is not merely a cognitive or mental accomplishment, but an affective one. In Descartes’s words, ‘[b]y the term ‘thought,’ I understand everything which we are aware of as happening within us, in so far as we have awareness of it. Hence, *thinking* is to be identified here not merely with understanding, willing, and imagining, but also with sensory awareness (*imaginans quoque et sentiens*)’.<sup>21</sup> According to Henry, then, it is this *immanent* ‘self-sensing that originally presents thought to itself and makes it what it is, [namely] appearance’s original self-appearing’.<sup>22</sup> Rather than unfolding in a rarified, sterile realm, thought always

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<sup>19</sup> Henry, *I am the Truth*, p. 56. As Henry states in an earlier text, the subject’s immediate self-awareness is characterised by ‘its Being-riveted-to-itself in the perfect adherence of identity’. Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, p. 660.

<sup>20</sup> Lilian Alweiss, ‘The Bifurcated Subject’, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17, no. 3 (2009), 415-434 (p. 424).

<sup>21</sup> Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume 2*, p. 195.

<sup>22</sup> Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, p. 22.

involves this immediate self-sensing.<sup>23</sup> As Henry writes, ‘Descartes continuously affirms that we sense our thought, sense that we see, that we hear, that we warm ourselves’.<sup>24</sup> Thus, as one commentator correctly concludes, ‘(T)o say that “I see that I am certain” is a type of thought-sensing and *not* merely “thinking that I see” in the sceptical sense: “thinking that I see is sensing that I see”. Sensing is a type of thinking, a ‘primal sensing.’<sup>25</sup>

In this case, what Henry sees Descartes’s account of thought as alighting upon, however unwittingly, is that all facets of our original self-experience rest upon a basic self-sensing. In experiencing this or that affective state, in experiencing joy or pain, excitement or boredom, we not only experience the affective tonality itself — i.e. the joy or suffering — but also our own self and life. In each of its affective experiences, the self experiences itself as being alive, that is, as a living being who immediately senses its own living, who senses or lives-through its joy and pain, its moving and breathing, and so on. Therefore,

it is altogether possible to say ‘I’m walking, therefore I am,’ [or, for that matter, ‘I’m crying, therefore I am] on the condition that one understands by this the immediate experience of the walk, the walk reduced to what it really is for the one who is walking, the pure subjective experience of the act of walking. Reduced to this pure experience, walking is nothing other than a *cogitatio* and, thus, is fundamental to what I am, to the *sum* as well as to the ‘I think.’ It is only a modality of this ‘I think’ itself in the Cartesian sense, understood as that which is experienced immediately in and of itself.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Therefore, while Descartes is occasionally charged with reducing human life to cognitive or rational thought, this is far from being the case. Descartes develops an account of thinking that goes well beyond what has become the standard, everyday understanding of the term. Henry is certainly not the only one to pick up on this point. The point has also been made by Heidegger, amongst others. See Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, pp. 19, 22.

<sup>24</sup> Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, p. 21.

<sup>25</sup> John Mullarkey, *Post-Continental Philosophy: An Outline* (New York: Continuum, 2006), p. 53.

<sup>26</sup> Michel Henry, ‘Incarnation and the Problem of Touch’, in *Carnal Hermeneutics*, ed. by Richard Kearney and Brian Treanor (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 140.

With this account of the subject's primal self-awareness, then, what Henry is effectively trying to say about all of our experiences, as Zahavi remarks, is that,

experiences are essentially characterized by having a subjective 'feel' to them, that is, a certain quality of 'what it is like', or what it 'feels' like to have them. When I am conscious, I 'feel' my experience, i.e. I am aware of what it is like to have it. This way of 'feeling' the experience does not presuppose the intervention of mediation of any sense organ or higher-order intentional act, but is simply a question of a direct and immediate *self-affection* [...]. To be in pain, embarrassed, happy, or stubborn is to be (self-)aware of it. It is, so to speak, both a way of being and a way of being aware.<sup>27</sup>

This account of the subject's primal self-awareness thus tries to speak to something fairly simple, even naive, about the nature of our experience. As Sébastien Laoureux notes, '[t]he experience "of feeling that one is oneself" has a kind of obviousness that material phenomenology wants to seize upon in all its depth and specificity.'<sup>28</sup> What it is like to feel myself living, to feel myself walking or breathing, gazing at the setting sun or smelling fresh coffee in the morning, involves an immediacy and a singularity that Henry's account of the subject's primal awareness is trying to articulate.

### 3.4 THE EMBODIED *COGITO*

Bearing all of this in mind, Henry contends that Descartes's *cogito* is necessarily embodied. Indeed, Descartes's own work offers support for this view, as when he notes that

we also experience within ourselves certain other things which must not be referred either to the mind alone or to the body alone. These arise [...] from the close and intimate union of our mind with the body. This list includes first, appetites like hunger and thirst, secondly, the emotions or passions of the mind

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<sup>27</sup> Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity: A Phenomenological Investigation* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1999), p. 111.

<sup>28</sup> Sébastien Laoureux, 'Hyper-transcendentalism and Intentionality: On the Specificity of the 'Transcendental' in Material Phenomenology', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17, no. 3 (2009), 389-400 (p. 396).

which do not consist of thought alone, such as emotions of anger, joy, sadness and love, and finally, all the sensations, such as those of pain, pleasure, light, colours, sounds, smells, tastes, heat, hardness and the other tactile qualities.<sup>29</sup>

The existence of such sensory states suggests that there is a primal bond between mind and body.<sup>30</sup> As Descartes explains, if the bond between mind and body were not essential to the being of the subject, then

I, who am nothing but a thinking thing, would not feel pain when the body was hurt, but would perceive the damage purely by the intellect, just as a sailor perceives by sight if anything in his ship is broken. Similarly, when the body needed food or drink, I should have an explicit understanding of the fact, instead of having confused sensations of hunger and thirst. For these sensations of hunger, thirst, pain and so on, are nothing but confused modes of thinking which arise from the union and, as it were, intermingling of the mind with the body.<sup>31</sup>

Yet since states such as hunger and pain are not experienced or properly known by a pure consciousness, but by one which is immersed in and determined by the sensibility of its bodily being, Descartes feels justified in asserting that there are states which require an essential bond between mind and body.<sup>32</sup>

In Henry's view, these unique sensations, and the fundamental bond they imply between mind and body, do not call into question Descartes's basic dualism between the mind (i.e. the soul, thought) and the extended body that appears in the spatio-temporal world. As we know, Descartes's radical *epoche* eliminates all beings — i.e. extended bodies — and their way of appearing — i.e. the ecstatic appearing of the world. According to Henry, the bond in question merely indicates that what remains after the radical *epoche*, namely, the *cogito*, should itself be understood as a transcendental bodily life — what Henry also refers to as the subjective body or the flesh — as a transcenden-

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<sup>29</sup> René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume 1*, trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 209.

<sup>30</sup> Alweiss, 'The Bifurcated Self', p. 423.

<sup>31</sup> Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume 2*, p. 238.

<sup>32</sup> Alweiss, 'The Bifurcated Self', p. 423.

tal affectivity or pathos (*videor*), which consists in an immediate and non-objectifying self-affection. The *cogito*, as the first principle of everything, as the original upsurge of appearing (i.e. being) that first enables everything to come to be and to be known, should be understood as a radically immanent bodily awareness.

Consequently, what Henry, through his reading of Descartes, does a better job of recognising than did Husserl, is the fact that the body is not first or primarily known as an object of outer sense perception. As seen here, the radically immanent and non-objectifying self-embrace of the flesh allows the subject to know its body as its own from the very beginning, without having to be objectified.<sup>33</sup> If this is the case, then, contrary to Husserl, whose own approach and understanding of the lived body is determined by this presumed priority of objectifying perception, the experience of one's own bodily life cannot, in principle, be properly or sufficiently approached by way of a derivative of thing-perception, or from the analogy of thing-perception. Therefore, contrary to what Husserl suggests, there can be no pure ego that would in principle be irreducible to its lived body. The living subject does not, as in Husserl, first have a pure mental awareness of itself, which would be existentially or logically prior to and independent of anything outside this consciousness, including its body, such that it would only come to apprehend and 'possess' its body as its own 'from the outside' in the objectifying experience of touch (or visual outer sense perception).<sup>34</sup> Rather, transcendental subjectivity is embodied through and through, and essentially comes to know itself by way of its bodily awareness.

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<sup>33</sup> As Zahavi notes, according to Henry, '[w]hen I am conscious of my bodily movements and sensibility, then I am conscious of it by virtue of the body itself; more precisely, by virtue of the very self-affection of bodily life, and not because the body has become my intentional object.' Dan Zahavi, 'Subjectivity and Immanence in Michel Henry', in *Subjectivity and transcendence*, ed. by Arne Grøn, Iben Damgaard, and Søren Overgaardp (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), pp. 133-147 (p. 148).

<sup>34</sup> Husserl, *Ideas II*, pp. 152, 223, 226; Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 97.

Furthermore, if we accept this reading of Descartes, then the ontological monism that is said to dominate the history of Western thought has been at least momentarily interrupted. By rejecting all things and their appearance — i.e. the ecstatic appearing of the world — Descartes’s radical *epoche* reveals that this ecstatic mode of appearing is in fact based upon the radically immanent and affective appearing of the subjective body,<sup>35</sup> in which the subject can indeed know itself in its simple self-revelation, without referring to anything other than itself.<sup>36</sup> This is why, for Henry, contra Husserl’s abstractions of the act of outer (sense) perception and reflective inner (immanent) perception in his transcendental reduction:

sight in its ecstatic structure (the eye and its mirror) does not constitute phenomenality’s first actuality and upwelling. On the contrary, seeing can see what is seen only if it is first possible as seeing, that is, is apperceived in itself [i.e. in the primal self-sensing of the subjective body]. So this apperception is inherent to ekstasis and precedes it instead of being constituted by it. It is appearance’s original self-appearing; the One of Difference; radical exteriority’s radical interiority; the internal knowledge that precedes acquisition; the *videor* of *videre*, what knows the eye, the mirror, and itself.<sup>37</sup>

In leading the subject back to this forgotten essence of appearing, Henry views Descartes as providing phenomenology with an opportunity to at last move beyond what he regards as its overly intellectualist tendencies, and to begin to properly explore the tremendous promise of affectivity, both in terms of its decisive role in the subject’s constitution of itself and meaningfulness of the world, and in its ability to furnish the subject with an insight into the way in which things are given to us in their perfect self-givenness. In order to begin to get a sense for this promise of affectivity, as conceived

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<sup>35</sup> Henry, ‘The Soul According to Descartes’, in *Science of René Descartes*, ed. by Voss, pp. 41-42.

<sup>36</sup> Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, p. 15.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

by Henry, we will need to delve further into his own development of the subject's radically immanent way of living.

### 3.5 THE GENERATIVE MOVEMENT OF LIFE

Indeed, Henry maintains that Descartes's discovery of the *cogito* was of such a radical nature that he himself was not able to appreciate its significance or fully explicate its structure.<sup>38</sup> Shortly after pointing toward affectivity as the essence of thought, Descartes begins to alter his position and to align the *cogito* with seeing and objectivity.<sup>39</sup> The *cogito* effectively becomes a *cogito me cogitare*, a self-representation that accompanies all of my representations.<sup>40</sup> Whatever the motivations for the shift — a deficient understanding of his own discovery, as Henry contends, or perhaps the pressure he may have felt to couch his findings in the Scholastic terms of his time — Descartes effectively covers over and obfuscates his initial insights into the *cogito* before he is able to demonstrate exactly how it enables the subject to constitute itself and

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<sup>38</sup> As he writes, Descartes 'gave the concept of consciousness its ontologically radical significance, in which that concept designates appearance considered in itself — not just some thing but the principle of every thing, the original manifestation in which everything that can exist comes to be a phenomenon and so into being for us. Descartes introduced the concept of consciousness at such a depth, however, that its primal importance could not be preserved or truly perceived, not even when taken up again by contemporary phenomenology, which claimed to develop it fully — not even, I would say, by Descartes himself'. Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44, 47.



the world, in short, before he is able to develop a full-fledged material phenomenology.<sup>41</sup>

In light of this, Henry comes to see the development of the *cogito*, understood as the immanent and affective self-appearing of bodily life, as the future of phenomenology. The history of the subject being what it is in Western philosophy, in taking up this task, Henry is adamant that his work should not be regarded as a bit of nostalgia, as an attempt to resurrect this long-fallen spectre that we call the subject, ‘like the return of a past reality that, tired of being neglected, would aspire to play once again a role on the philosophical stage’.<sup>42</sup> Insofar as ‘the Being of the subject has never been [fully] recognized’, it is not the subject’s “return” that is announced’ in Henry’s phenomenology of life, ‘but its first coming’.<sup>43</sup>

Though this point has not been as well observed as one might expect, the crux of Henry’s account of the being of the subject, and his second principle argument for positing this radically immanent way of being, centres around the concept of generation.<sup>44</sup> The subject’s way of being consists in the productive movement of life, or what Henry

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<sup>41</sup> The ‘material’ Henry has in mind is not the physical matter or objective reality that is studied by the sciences, but the phenomenological life, or transcendental affectivity, that we are. As Ray Brassier points out, Henry thus spiritualises matter to such an extent that ‘there is no longer anything remotely “physical” left about it’. Ray Brassier, ‘Alien Theory: The Decline of Materialism in the Name of Matter’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2001), p. 82. Descartes’s primary *epistemological motivation* to refute the Pyrrhonian skepticism of Montaigne by finding one item of knowledge (and its criterion from within that item of knowledge) would appear to be the main factor in *his* overlooking of the significance of the certainty of one’s own existence as opposed to the significance of the *knowledge* that I exist with absolute *epistemic* certainty at the termination of his process of methodic doubt.

<sup>42</sup> Henry, ‘The Critique of the Subject’, in *Who Comes After The Subject?* ed. by Cadava et al, p. 165.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Though the central importance of the concept of generation in the work of Henry has in general been less than well observed, Joseph Rivera deserves credit for drawing some attention to this matter in *The Contemplative Self After Michel Henry: A Phenomenological Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015). See also his article ‘Generation, interiority and the phenomenology of Christianity in Michel Henry’, *Continental Philosophy Review* 44, no. 2 (2011), 205-235.

calls subjective movement.<sup>45</sup> While there is a strong continuity to Henry's work, his account of the generative movement of life does undergo some alteration over the course of his writings. His position on this matter can be seen as roughly unfolding in two stages: in the earlier texts, where the religious character of his work has not yet been explicitly rendered, and in his later, overtly Christian studies. We will proceed through these stages chronologically.

While Henry fleshes out the role of movement in the bodily life of the living individual in increasingly greater detail as his work develops, its central role in a proper understanding of life is acknowledged from the very beginning. According to Henry, this is something that the late French philosopher Maine de Biran understood better than Descartes. In his *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, Henry credits de Biran with the first stirrings of an acknowledgment that movement is not first and foremost a transcendent phenomenon, as Descartes supposed, but is to be identified with 'the original sphere of existence [i.e. life]'.<sup>46</sup> "Subjective movement" is an ontological determination of the body that "defines the real body, and not the idea of the body, as a subjective and transcendental being".<sup>47</sup> Therefore, subjective movement 'is not the product of constitution in the Husserlian sense of intentional acts but is directly known in "in-

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<sup>45</sup> Henry maintains that Schopenhauer and Nietzsche both endeavour to speak to the movement of life, though in ways that ultimately remain insufficiently developed. See Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 169, 245.

<sup>46</sup> Michel Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, trans. by Girard Etzkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), p. 57. In his reading of de Biran, Henry outlines how de Biran takes considerable strides toward deepening Descartes's account of the *cogito* with his insights into subjective movement. *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>47</sup> Maxine-Sheets Johnstone, 'Essential clarifications of 'self-affection and Husserl's "sphere of ownness": First steps toward a pure phenomenology of (human) nature', *Continental Philosophy Review* 39, no. 4 (2006), 361-391 (p. 368); Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, p. 57.

ternal transcendental experience”<sup>48</sup> Movement stands ‘at the heart of subjective life: “the being of movement is a subjective being”<sup>49</sup>

To try and come to grips with Henry’s account of this subjective movement of affectivity, we need to first understand the basic distinction that Henry draws between affectivity and particular affective tonalities, that is, between ‘the pathic self-relation which is ever the self-same life and the modalities, e.g. sensations, feelings, etc’.<sup>50</sup> The life (i.e. primal self-sensing) of the subject functions as a generative movement in the sense that it continuously comes into and effects itself in an immanent and non-horizonal manner. Because the subject experiences its life in this way, and is irredeemably crushed upon against itself without distance or mediation, it experiences the movement of life as an original passivity and suffering. That is to say, it experiences the movement of life as something it cannot will or control, but can only undergo and endure. Suffering is thus not merely a particular affective tonality that comes and goes over the course of one’s life. Instead, suffering belongs to the fundamental structure of life and accompanies ‘one’s life as a whole’.<sup>51</sup> Far from being ‘an unhappy accident, a natural peculiarity, or the necessity of an incomprehensible fate’, suffering is ‘the *a priori* structure and innermost possibility of all that is, or as Nietzsche, following Schopenhauer, said, the Mother of Being’.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, the arch-suffering of life should not be taken in a

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<sup>48</sup> Johnstone, ‘Essential clarifications of ‘self-affection and Husserl’s ‘sphere of ownness’’, p. 368.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 369; Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, p. 62.

<sup>50</sup> James Hart, ‘Michel Henry’s Phenomenological Theology of Life: A Husserlian Reading of *C’est moi, la vérité*’, *Husserl Studies* 15, no. 3 (1999), 183-230 (p. 213).

<sup>51</sup> László Tengelyi, ‘Selfhood, Passivity and Affectivity in Henry and Lévinas’, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17, no. 3 (2009), 401-414 (p. 404). Consequently, as Tengelyi writes, life’s immanent coming into itself ‘assigns to every feeling, even to the most joyful one, an irremediable character of suffering’. As Henry writes, ‘[e]very mode of life, therefore, is merely the modalization of a single suffering: here weariness; there shame, regret, remorse, boredom, disgust, infinite fatigue.’ Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 177-178.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

negative sense. It merely indicates that life is characterised by a fundamental powerlessness or impotence, in that its movement is a ‘gift which cannot be refused’, but only endured.<sup>53</sup>

By the same token, life’s continuous coming into itself means that every feeling is equally coloured by enjoyment.<sup>54</sup> Because life, in its immanent movement of self-surpassing, finds itself crushed up against itself in its very being, ‘one may equally say that it “arrives at itself, and becomes what it is”. This identity of a feeling with itself is a source of enjoyment’.<sup>55</sup> Another way of expressing this would be to say that in the movement whereby life finds itself thrust up against itself, it simultaneously finds itself put in possession of all of its abilities — its ability to act, feel, think and so on. In a word, life’s immanent movement imbues it with a certain feeling of powerfulness; it imbues each feeling with ‘a certain calm and quietness (*douceur*) [...] because every feeling is “always-already-given-to-itself” and because of the “tranquil force” resulting from this fact’.<sup>56</sup>

In reality, then, suffering and joy are not merely two separate affective tonalities, but belong together, and give life ‘a particular sense of reality’.<sup>57</sup> The movement of life is lived as a feeling of powerfulness that is equally immediately a feeling of powerless-

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<sup>53</sup> Henry, *L’essence de la manifestation*, p. 593.

<sup>54</sup> As Henry writes, ‘Suffering and Joy are never separated, the one is the condition of the other. The suffering of oneself provides the phenomenological matter for the enjoyment of oneself. It produces the flesh out of which Joy is made. Joy, in turn, is only the phenomenological realization of this suffering and its fulfilment in the pathos of Being. It is the experience of oneself in the certitude and exaltation of oneself. One suffers and one’s suffering changes into Joy, such that, in this change, each term remains the phenomenological condition of the other and as its own substance.’ Michel Henry, *Barbarism*, trans. by Scott Davidson (New York: Continuum, 2012), p. 37.

<sup>55</sup> Tengelyi, ‘Selfhood, Passivity and Affectivity in Henry and Lévinas’, p. 404. Because of this, suffering and joy are the ‘fundamental ontological forms’ of life. As Henry writes, suffering and joy ‘are not artificial and random tonalities resulting from facts of history, but the inescapable conditions of its innermost possibility and thus of life itself’. Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 37.

<sup>56</sup> Tengelyi, ‘Selfhood, Passivity and Affectivity in Henry and Lévinas’, p. 405.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 404.

ness or impotence — inasmuch as the same movement that engenders life's ability or potentiality is also one that it cannot refuse. Life cannot not experience itself as this incessant movement of coming into itself, as this 'perpetual oscillation between suffering and joy'.<sup>58</sup>

Yet, this does not yet provide us with a full and complete understanding of the generative movement of life. For Henry claims that life is not an abstract feeling that occurs apart from its particular affective tonalities. Similar to Husserl's characterisation of the primal flow (i.e. experiencing) and its acts (subjective experiences) as being distinct yet inseparable moments in one and the same flow of consciousness, Henry maintains that life (i.e. self-affection) is distinct and yet inseparable from the particular affective tonalities that arise within the life of one and the same living individual. As James Hart puts this, 'Life is not an unknown "I know not what" over and above the modalities; rather the pathic self-relation is lived only through these modalities and none of these comprise essentially the original pathic self-relation of original non-reflexive self-manifestation.'<sup>59</sup> In Henry's case, the movement of affectivity comes into and engenders itself only in engendering the particular affective tonalities in which it receives itself. Instead of being simple, life is always composite because, as a movement that continuously comes into and produces itself, life always makes more of itself, it always produces and experiences itself in new waves of affects. Put differently, as László Tengelyi notes, the movement of life is such that 'every feeling has a *tendency to surpass itself* [...]. Paradoxically, feeling transcends itself precisely *by arriving at itself*, by becoming that which it is and nothing else'.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 68.

<sup>59</sup> Hart, 'Michel Henry's Phenomenological Theology of Life', p. 213.

<sup>60</sup> Tengelyi, 'Selfhood, Passivity and Affectivity in Henry and Lévinas', p. 405.

As the movement of life consists in this generation of ever-new impressions, Henry eventually begins to describe it as a need, more specifically, as a need that is driven for more of itself.<sup>61</sup> In its generative movement, life is not driven for something it lacks, for something other than itself, but simply for ‘more’ of itself. As this perpetual self-overflowing into itself, life constantly stands in need of more of itself.<sup>62</sup> Life is, therefore, nothing other than a movement of self-growth. Life needs to grow, to further its ability to act, sense, feel, think, and so on.

As such, Henry eventually comes to understand the movement of life as a primal temporality and historicity.<sup>63</sup> By engendering ever-new affects, the movement of life effectively engenders the subject’s original, first-person sense of time and history. As this movement continuously comes into itself, and is thus without limitation or end, Henry regards the time of life as infinite. Therefore, life does not know of a beginning or end, but only the ever-developing history of its lived impressions.

Lest any confusion arise, Henry does not view this time of life as involving any kind of fracture or transcendence. The time of life is immanent, non-ecstatic and non-horizontal. It, therefore, occurs as a primal and permanent Now or living present, without any trace of a past, future or present. What we are left with is effectively ‘a stable form for changing content’.<sup>64</sup> As Henry writes, ‘[l]ike Euripus Strait, life is changing, but yet through its variations it does not cease to be life in an absolute sense. It is the

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<sup>61</sup> Michel Henry, *Seeing the Invisible: On Kandinsky*, trans. by Scott Davidson (New York: Continuum, 2009), pp. 19, 26, 46, 51-52; Michel Henry, *From Communism to Capitalism: Theory of a Catastrophe*, trans. by Scott Davidson (New York: Continuum, 2014), pp. 25-27, 102.

<sup>62</sup> ‘[S]ubjectivity is entirely need’, as Henry puts this. Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 19.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>64</sup> John Protevi, ‘Philosophy of Consciousness and the Body’, in *Continuum Companion to Continental Philosophy*, ed. by Beth Lord and John Mullarkey (New York: Continuum, 2009), pp. 69-92 (p. 76).

same Life, the same experience of the self that does not cease to experience itself, to be absolutely the same, one single and same self.’<sup>65</sup>

An eminent example of this immanent movement that Henry frequently refers to is the experience of pain. Here we come to the second argument for Henry’s insistence on the subject’s radically immanent way of living. Henry provides an account of our experience of pain in the following passage:

[p]ure pain is pure suffering, it is this suffering’s immanence to itself — a suffering without horizon, without hope, entirely occupied with itself because it fills the entire place, so that there is no other place for it but the one it occupies. It is impossible for it to leave itself, or to escape itself, or to get ahead of itself — by throwing itself outside like one subjected to torture throws himself through the window to escape his persecutors — in order to escape its torture, and its suffering [...]. As soon as suffering is there, it is entirely there indeed, as a sort of absolute. For the one who suffers, nothing infringes upon his suffering. Suffering has neither doors nor windows, and no space outside it or within it that would allow it to escape [...]. Between suffering and suffering, there is nothing. For the one who suffers, for as long as he suffers, [ecstatic] time does not exist [...]. Suffering is driven back against itself [...]. Suffering is not affected by something else, but by itself; it is *a self-affection* in the radical sense that suffering is what is affected, but it is by suffering that it is so. It is at once affecting and affected, what makes it hurt and what hurts, without distinction.<sup>66</sup>

As this detailed analysis reveals, it appears to be proper to our first-person experience of pain that the pain is not static, but occurs as a movement that has its own time and history, and yet a movement that, according to Henry, is unable to move to an outside, but which can only ever come into and develop in itself. Indeed, it is this fundamental inability to escape, this inability for the pain to transcend itself, and to instead find itself riveted to itself in a radial immanence, that, if we follow Henry, appears to make pain what it is.<sup>67</sup> There is certainly something to this account. During an especially distress-

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<sup>65</sup> Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, p. 38. John Protevi also addresses this passage in ‘Philosophy of Consciousness and the Body’, in *Companion to Continental Philosophy*, ed. by Lord, p. 76. For more on Henry’s account of the time of life, see his ‘Phénoménologie de la naissance’, *Alter* 2 (1994), 295-312 (p. 311).

<sup>66</sup> Henry, *Incarnation*, p. 58.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

ing or painful moment in one's life, one might try to do any number of things to relieve the pain, and yet, try as one might, there is at least some sense in which the pain remains insurmountable. As Henry has it, this experience of pain, in which the pain seems to be continuously thrust back upon itself and 'crushed under its own weight', provides us with compelling evidence of the radically immanent and affective movement of life.<sup>68</sup>

### 3.6 THE ARCH-PRESENCE OF LIFE

Since this movement of life is radically immanent, and so, cannot ever appear according to the ecstatic order that structures consciousness, as something that can be presented to our intuition, Henry further specifies that it must ultimately be understood as unconscious. While his work in *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis* is highly critical of what he refers to as the representational unconscious — i.e. the unconscious understood as 'representation's other', as a container for those contents that no longer appear within or exercise any influence on representational consciousness — he maintains that life itself serves as an original unconscious. As he writes, '*the unconscious is the name of life*'.<sup>69</sup> The generative movement of life, as the absolute foundation of being, is, if you like, a productive and creative unconscious, an infinite free play of the dark forces that make up the secret inner life of the flesh.

In effect, the significance of the generative movement of life that Western thought has overlooked consists, at least in part, in its ability to engender things that happen outside the power of consciousness. As we will recall, in his early time-lectures, Husserl is reluctant to explicitly acknowledge that transcendental subjectivity has its

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, p. 286.



basis in an unconscious life. While Henry is not without his own criticisms of what he sees as the traditional account of the unconscious — i.e. the representational unconscious — his study of life ultimately brings him to a more explicit acknowledgment of its importance for a proper understanding of the subject. It is to Henry's credit that he draws attention to this oft-neglected feature of life: its fundamental ability to cause affective states and actions to happen that lie outside the purview and power of consciousness.

In this sense, the generative movement of affectivity should be seen as a source of radical novelty. Rather than having to receive its sensory content from outside itself, by continuously coming into itself, the life of the living individual produces its own content; it continuously 'brings into being what has not yet taken place in being: hitherto inexperienced tones, impressions, emotions, feelings and forces' that lie outside the realm of what consciousness can anticipate, expect, or even control, something radically new that can disturb and interrupt the otherwise steady flow of our sedimented expectations and habits.<sup>70</sup>

This productivity of life becomes perhaps especially apparent in Henry's study of the cultural life of the living individual. In his study of the paintings and theoretical reflections of Wassily Kandinsky, Henry credits the Russian painter and art-theorist with the discovery that the generative movement of life functions as a kind of transcendental imagination.<sup>71</sup> Traditionally, the imagination 'is the faculty of representing a thing in its absence'.<sup>72</sup> The imagination is here thought to consist in the production of irreal images and representations, such that its products are themselves imaginary — i.e. they re-

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<sup>70</sup> Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, pp. 107-108.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 36.

present absent things to us as if they were really there before us. According to Henry, though, what Kandinsky glimpses, and what our own account of the generative moment of life reveals, is that ‘the imagination belongs to life’, that the generative movement of life is nothing short of a transcendental imagination.<sup>73</sup> It can therefore be said that the primal significance of the subject that Western thought has failed to glimpse is that the subjective body is a transcendental imagination, and that, as a result, the imagination does not merely consist in ‘the power to form images’, but in ‘the proper history of subjectivity’, in ‘the expansion of its pathos, the movement by which each tone awakens another tone and then another within itself’.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, the products of the imagination are not strictly speaking imaginary; they consist in the very real affective tonalities that are engendered within our flesh. In this sense Henry notes that ‘[t]he imagination is indeed creative, even in a radical sense that gives it a positivity that was not glimpsed by classical thought.’<sup>75</sup>

As radically immanent, this generative movement of life must ultimately be understood as an arch-presence. As the transcendental history of life expels ecstasis and cannot ever admit of any distance, transcendental subjectivity must in essence be understood as a mode of presence that, while founding the ecstatic and visible appearing (or presence) of the world, always and forever stands outside of it. Strangely enough, because the arch-presence of life, as the essence of all appearing, cannot ever appear within the visible display of the world, it is itself radically invisible; it is a mode of appearing that can never be seen, but which can only ever be felt and lived — hence a felt presence.

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<sup>73</sup> Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, pp. 107-108.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

Consequently, Henry's conception of life leaves us with a radical bifurcation of the two modes of appearing. In construing the transcendental life of the subject as a radically immanent mode of appearing, Henry attempts to separate the transcendental from the empirical, life from the world, immanence from transcendence, the non-intentional from the intentional, the invisible from the visible. On his account, then, the history of life has no relation to or dependence upon the world or intentionality. It remains forever refractory to the ecstatic temporality of the world, and thus to the intuitive present that has traditionally been granted primacy as the source of all truth and knowledge.

On the one hand, because of this, as commentators such as Emmanuel Falque have pointed out, Henry renders the transcendental life of the individual a 'flesh without body'.<sup>76</sup> Henry divorces the transcendental flesh, which he regards as the reality of the subject, from the empirical body as it appears within the transcendence of the world, which is seen as an extreme unreality or illusion, in the sense that life can never appear therein.<sup>77</sup> He denies that anything other than this radically immanent and non-intentional affectivity is essential to the nature of the subject, thereby reducing intentionality and thought to secondary and illusory by-products of life. In short, Henry angelises life as something a-cosmic and indifferent to anything outside itself. On the other hand, by arguing that there is a mode of presence — an arch-presence — of an altogether different order, one that, while making the visible disclosure of the world possible, can never appear within the latter and thereby allow itself to be grasped by intuition or perception,

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<sup>76</sup> Emmanuel Falque, 'Y a-t-il une chair sans corps?' in *Phénoménologie et christianisme chez Michel Henry: Les derniers écrits de Michel Henry en débat*, ed. by Philippe Capelle (Paris: Cerf, 2004), pp. 95-133.

<sup>77</sup> Hence Henry's description of affectivity as 'that which is felt without the intermediary of any sense whatsoever'. Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, p. 462. For Henry, the subjective body is 'a body before sensation, and before the world'. Henry, *Incarnation*, p. 148.

Henry manages to escape, in some ways, the metaphysics of presence that ensnares Husserl's work.<sup>78</sup>

### 3.7 PRIMAL SELFHOOD

It is not immediately apparent, nonetheless, how this unconscious movement of life actually engenders a sense of selfhood. On the one hand, Henry says that '[i]t is suffering that suffers.'<sup>79</sup> That is to say, suffering is not affected by anything other than itself, such that it is at once affecting and affected. On the other hand, Henry explicitly states that the flesh is not impersonal and anonymous, but is always the flesh of someone. László Tengelyi offers the helpful suggestion that because life continuously surpasses and arrives at itself and nothing else,

feeling becomes fixed and crystallized within a milieu of a diffuse and fluent affectivity; thus, it loses its agility and its multivocality. Henry says: '*In a feeling the absence of surpassing — its identity with itself — is that which surpasses it.* Such a surpassing, that of identity, accomplishing itself in identity, gives to a feeling its content.' This is the way in which an affective attunement becomes an affect, a particular feeling: love or happiness, sadness or despair. It is this process of coagulation of particular feelings that provides us with the missing link between affectivity and selfhood. This process conveys to feeling 'the weight of its proper being'. Feeling becomes the feeling of a self. In *The Essence of Manifestation*, we are told: 'That which, in this way, is charged by itself, for being itself once and for all, is solely what may be rightly described as a self.'<sup>80</sup>

On this reading, it is life's tendency to surpass itself by continuously coming into itself and engendering new affective tonalities that conditions and makes possible the selfhood of the self. As François-David Sebbah notes, the movement of life can thus be

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<sup>78</sup> Sébastien Laoureux argues that Henry in some ways escapes what Derrida calls the metaphysics of presence in his article 'Material Phenomenology To The Test Of Deconstruction: Michel Henry And Derrida', *Studia Phaenomenologica* 9 (2009), 234-246 (pp. 245-246).

<sup>79</sup> Henry, *Incarnation*, p. 58.

<sup>80</sup> Tengelyi, 'Selfhood, Passivity and Affectivity in Henry and Lévinas', pp. 405-406; Henry, *L'essence de la manifestation*, pp. 590, 582.

seen as ‘a paradoxical blossoming’ or springing forth in that it emerges ‘only to itself, in itself’ — it is “arrival in self”.<sup>81</sup>

An important part of the significance of Henry’s account of the self-sensing of life as a generative movement thus consists in the fact that the essence of subjectivity ‘is a work and an [ever-ongoing] accomplishment’.<sup>82</sup> It is life’s tendency to surpass itself and to engender ever-new affective tonalities that gives the life of each individual its distinct and ever-developing sense of self.

We are thus left with a very particular sense of self — not the immobility of a thing, the ‘pure and simple identity to self — “empty” and thus solidified in something like a death — that would give forth nothing’.<sup>83</sup> Rather, the movement of affectivity engenders a self — or an ‘ipseity’ (*ipséité*), to use Henry’s language —<sup>84</sup> whose way of being consists in nothing other than this movement of self-engendering, that is to say, a self that comprises the incessant generation and production of a veritable wealth of lived impressions, in life’s pains and pleasures, its hungers and desires, and so on. The self, in other words, with which Henry is concerned, is neither the objectified self before or after Husserl implements the reduction of the natural attitude to the transcendental-phenomenological attitude; it is rather what precedes any such reduction as an experience of life in concrete, individual, human existence. In this case, the self is not determined by its position within the ecstatic temporality of the world, but by virtue of its inherently

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<sup>81</sup> François-David Sebbah, *Testing the Limit: Derrida, Henry, Levinas, and the Phenomenological Tradition*, trans. by Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 159.

<sup>82</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 97.

<sup>83</sup> Sebbah, *Testing the Limit*, p. 159; Zahavi, ‘Subjectivity and Immanence in Michel Henry’, in *Subjectivity and transcendence*, ed. by Grøn et al, p. 11.

<sup>84</sup> As Henry explains in a later work, the ipseity of each living being consists in the ‘[t]he identity between experiencing and what is experienced.’ Henry, *I Am the Truth*, p. 56.

unique self-experience. Merely by virtue of experiencing itself, each living being is individuated as a radically singular self.<sup>85</sup>

### 3.8 THE QUESTION OF DIVINE GENESIS

Henry's work can thus be seen as clarifying what transcendental subjectivity really is. Transcendental subjectivity must at heart be understood, not as a disembodied pure ego — as in Husserl — but as the unconscious, generative movement and history of a living, embodied subject; a transcendental ego that has its own time and history, and which engenders and embraces the wealth of all of our bodily impressions and powers. An important issue that we have yet to touch upon, and which needs to be addressed, is whether the transcendental life that is outlined in Henry's earlier work is simply that of the living human being, or whether it should in some way be identified with an absolute God. This issue is by no means settled and obvious. Andrew Sackin-Poll, for instance, believes that there is a certain 'ambiguity with regard to the theological status of Life found in the early works'.<sup>86</sup> On the one hand, one does find in some of the early works statements that identify life with God. In *The Essence of Manifestation*, for instance, Henry makes the following remark: 'Being and life [...] the life of God himself, an absolute life'.<sup>87</sup> That being said, exactly how the two might be connected, as well as the nature or status of this God more generally, are not spelled out in these early texts.

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<sup>85</sup> Henry, *Incarnation*, p. 20.

<sup>86</sup> Andrew Sackin-Poll, 'Michel Henry and Metaphysics: An Expressive Ontology', *Open Theology* 5 (2019), 405-419 (p. 418).

<sup>87</sup> Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, p. 670.

Given the indeterminate nature of this God, Poll raises the question as to whether Henry's initial equation of life with God is not similar to Spinoza's 'equation of Nature with God'?<sup>88</sup> As he writes,

[i]f the equation of Life with God is, indeed, Spinozist, then a similar, classical criticism of Spinoza's formula *Deus sive Natura* can also be raised against Henry's own equivocation: could not 'Life' simply be a secular experience of inner embodied life, without God? Could not such an immanent experience be closer to a Nietzschean conception of life (that is, after the 'death of God') than a Christian understanding of the living God? Could not the expression of life through suffering articulate simply the profound bond riveting the self to itself in a profoundly passive relation to the *pathos* of life, like the early phenomenological works of Emmanuel Levinas?<sup>89</sup>

As Henry's early works do not admit of any form of transcendence in the life of the living individual, he is barred from an explicitly theological engagement with a divine transcendence. Thus Poll remarks that since there is no fracture or alterity within life, '[t]he living self is seemingly incarcerated in its own self-affecting life.'<sup>90</sup> This in and of itself 'renders problematic Henry's own nomination of Life as "God"'.<sup>91</sup>

If we take into consideration the fact that Henry's early studies draw fairly heavily on the work of figures such as Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, this lends only further credence to the suggestion that this early account of life does not necessarily need to be seen in a Judeo-Christian theological light. Indeed, for all of his criticisms of Descartes, Henry views Nietzsche as in some ways further drawing out Descartes's essential insights into the *cogito*. As Henry writes in an early essay, '[f]or an adequate formulation of the *cogito* it is necessary to wait a long time, to wait for Nietzsche, who will say, not

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<sup>88</sup> Sackin-Poll, 'Michel Henry and Metaphysics: An Expressive Ontology', p. 417.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

“I am”, but in a more rigorous and fundamental way “I am who I am.”<sup>92</sup> While Henry is not without his criticisms of Nietzsche (which we examine later) he also finds in his work a compelling argument for the central role that our bodily life plays in the constitution of the normative and intelligible character of our lived experience, one that very much informs his own account of these matters.

On a still more basic level, the prospect of a strictly secular reading of Henry’s early account of life gains further traction when we acknowledge the fact that life is a phenomenological concept that arises in response to a set of strictly phenomenology problems, namely, how, if at all, can transcendental subjectivity, as the absolute foundation of all appearance and knowledge, manifest itself and thus in some way be known by the phenomenologist? Furthermore, who or what is transcendental subjectivity, and how should we understand the way in which it functions in the constitution of itself and the world? In attempting to address these matters, Henry’s concept of life joins the long-standing philosophical tradition that endeavours to attain a genuine insight into the first principles of all experience and knowledge. Given these roots, Henry’s account of life can be taken in a strictly phenomenological way, as a concept that illuminates the innermost recesses of the human subject’s lived experience, and all of this without requiring any recourse to God.

The question as to who transcendental subjectivity really is thus remains a contentious and unsettled matter in the early works. It would appear, nonetheless, that Henry’s early account of life can proceed quite well without any association with a divine God. If viewed in a strictly secular way — as a kind of Dionysian life, to borrow the language of Nietzsche — then transcendental subjectivity would simply be the actual living human individual, understood in terms of its immanent mode of self-appearing,

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<sup>92</sup> Henry, ‘The Soul According to Descartes’, in *Science of René Descartes*, ed. by Voss, p. 45.



i.e., as the unconscious, generative movement of bodily life. Meanwhile, the empirical ego would consist in the subject as it appears in the ecstatic and worldly order of appearing. In this case, the difference between the transcendental and the empirical ego would not simply be a matter of philosophical method; it would not arise primarily out of the tension between the natural and transcendental-philosophical attitudes. Rather, it would be founded in our bodily life. This would represent a genuine step forward from the account of transcendental subjectivity that we find in Husserl, inasmuch as it lends some much needed clarity and specificity to the latter's rather vague and indecisive account of the matter. The same could be said of a theological account of the life of the living individual, but there would need to be some kind of evidence to support this view, and the precise nature of the connection between this living God and the living human being would need to be drawn out in a detailed and coherent manner.

### 3.9 A TURN TO CHRISTIANITY

If the question of who transcendental subjectivity really is — i.e. is it ultimately human or divine? — is one that remains undecided, or at least unclear in the early works, Henry's own position on the matter comes forward in a strikingly decisive manner in his latter texts, though in a way that is not itself without some potential issues. In the final stage of his career, Henry makes an explicit turn to Christianity, and to the insistence that the finite life of the human subject is engendered in an absolute and eternal life (i.e. God). In this sense, not unlike Husserl, Henry's transcendental project claims to reveal an a priori mode of knowledge that applies to 'all possible experience in general',

whether human, divine or alien.<sup>93</sup> Let us now take a moment to unpack this later account of life. While in this later phase Henry continues to insist that there is one life, one affectivity, it now enjoys two senses, a strong (i.e. absolute, eternal life) and a weak sense (i.e. relative, finite life), with each one immanent to the other.

The self-affection of the living God is strong in that it and it alone has the power to engender itself and all of the living selves — hence its absoluteness. In its eternal movement of coming into itself, absolute life engenders itself by engendering an arch-ipseity or first living self. As he explains in *I Am the Truth*,

[I]ife can embrace itself, and thus reveal itself to itself in the enjoyment of itself, only by generating in itself this Self that embraces itself as the phenomenological effectuation of its own self-embrace. This singular Self within which life embraces itself, this Self that is the sole possible mode in which this embrace occurs, is the First Living [Christ]. Thus, in its absolute self-generation, Life generates within itself He whose birth is the self-accomplishment of this Life — its self-accomplishment in the form of its self-revelation. The Father — if by this we understand the movement, which nothing precedes and of which nobody knows the name, by which Life is cast into itself in order to experience itself, this Father eternally engenders the Son within himself, if by the latter we understand the First Living in whose original and essential Ipseity the Father experiences himself.<sup>94</sup>

The strong affection of absolute life is thus that which engenders and gives all that is. Life is nothing other than this radical movement of giving, and what it gives is nothing other than itself. Hence, life can be seen as a gratuitous self-giving, as a free and undeserved gift, a radical novelty. Absolute life is both giver and gift, both affecting and affected, both Father and Son.

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<sup>93</sup> Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, p. 511. Admittedly, Henry does not speak much of non-human life. For a more extended treatment of the matter, see Christina M. Gschwandtner, 'What About Non-Human Life? An "Ecological" Reading of Michel Henry's Critique of Technology', *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy - Revue de la philosophie française et de langue française* 20, no. 2 (2012), 116-138.

<sup>94</sup> Henry, *I Am the Truth*, p. 57.

To the extent that absolute life experiences itself only by engendering and experiencing itself in and as an arch-ipseity (or arch-flesh), there is what Henry refers to as a reciprocal interiority between absolute life and the first living self.<sup>95</sup> As Henry writes,

the relationship between the Father and the Son [...] can be defined with absolute rigour as a relationship of reciprocal interiority, since the Son is revealed only in the Father's self-revelation, while the Father's self-revelation takes place only in, and as, the revelation of the Son. The primordial Father/Son relationship is not merely this relation whose essence is constituted by Life, nor is it merely this relation whose essence generates the terms. Rather, it also generates them as internal one to the other, such that they belong together, one and the other, in a co-belonging that is more powerful than any conceivable unity, in the inconceivable unity of Life whose self-engendering is one with the engendering of the Engendered.<sup>96</sup>

The reciprocal interiority between absolute life and the arch-ipseity is thus nothing other 'than the mode in which phenomenality originally phenomenizes itself — as the original phenomenality that is Life'.<sup>97</sup>

Understood in this way, the arch-ipseity of life serves as the condition of the ipseity of each finite living subject. The arch-flesh of life is that which immanently engenders and sustains the flesh of each living individual, and which each individual necessarily undergoes within its own flesh. Concretely, this means that, in its flesh, each living individual experiences that its life is not of its own making, but is something it passively receives from an absolute life that infinitely exceeds it, and in which it is continuously generated, whether it likes it or not.<sup>98</sup> This gives to the life of the finite living individual its weak tenor. The life of the finite living individual is weak in that it cannot engender itself and all of its powers and abilities. In this way, the life of the finite subject is relative to that of absolute life. The transcendental birth of the finite individual,

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

and the continued generation and subsistence of all of its powers, depends on the generative movement of an absolute life over which it has no control.

This weak sense of life gives to the finite individual the distinct nature of its self-experience. As weak,

[t]he Self is not only passive with respect to itself and each of the modalities of its life, as each suffering is passive with respect to itself and is only possible as such, taking its affective tenor solely from this passivity whose pure phenomenological tenor is affectivity as such. Above all, the Self is passive with respect to the eternal process of Life's self-affecting that engenders it and never ceases to do so. This passivity of the singular Self within Life is what puts it into the accusative case and makes of it a 'me' and not an 'I', this Self that is passive about itself only because it is passive to begin with about Life and its absolute self-affection. But this passivity of the singular Self in Life — the passivity making of it a 'me' — is not a metaphysical attribute posited by thought. It is phenomenologically determined such that it is constitutive of the Self's life and is therefore continually lived by that Self. This determination is so essential, the proof so constant, that our life becomes confused with this feeling of being lived.<sup>99</sup>

As continuously engendered in the eternal self-affection of life, the finite living individual experiences its life in the accusative, as something it does not itself posit, but which is given to it and which it passively receives time and again. Consequently, the life of the finite individual is experienced by said individual as a burden, as a weight it cannot lift, try as it might. At the same time, because the living individual finds itself affected in this way, it not only experiences itself in an accusative sense, but also in a nominative sense, as an 'I' or ego that, as given to itself in the strong affection of life, experiences itself as being in possession of itself, and thus as being capable of exercising all of its powers to sense, act and think.<sup>100</sup> The ego, in this sense, is distinguished from the self as an "I can".<sup>101</sup> As Henry writes, "I Can" deploy each of the powers that I find in me, because, coinciding with that power and placed inside it in some way, I have it at

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., pp. 107-108.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., pp. 136-137.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

my disposal and can exercise it whenever I care to and for as often as I want'.<sup>102</sup> In point of fact, though, since the ego's powers are engendered and given to it by an absolute and eternal life, all of its powers ultimately depend on this eternal life over which it has no power. At the heart of all of its myriad powers, then, the ego experiences its '*absolute powerlessness*'.<sup>103</sup>

For all these important differences between the strong and weak senses of life, it should be kept in mind that Henry always contends that we are nevertheless dealing with one and the same life. Absolute life does not stand over and beyond the life of each finite individual; it inaugurates itself only in the very movement by which it inaugurates the life of each finite individual. Therefore, absolute life is not older than the lives of living individuals, and it does not engender them from some kind of elsewhere or outside. Absolute life engenders each living individual as purely immanent to itself. While there is what Henry calls a '*pathetik difference*' in life, which consists in its strong and weak senses, it is pathetik in that it is a difference that does not consist in any fracture or ecstasis.<sup>104</sup> It is a difference of modality, wherein the two modalities — the strong and weak senses of life — remain immanent to one another.

As much as Henry insists that these dual senses of life remain radically immanent to one another, does not the introduction of this distinction necessarily break up the immanence of life in some significant sense? Without Henry's perhaps even realising it, has not a form of transcendence secretly stolen into, or emerged from within, the heart of life? As engendered within the arch-ipseity of absolute life, each living self experiences itself in its flesh as being lived, as being lived by a life of '*another order*', by a

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

‘phenomenological substance absolutely other than it’.<sup>105</sup> In suffering its own life, each living self does not merely suffer itself alone, but also the arch-suffering of absolute life, such that suffering is always experienced as involving something more within itself, as betraying ‘another life’.<sup>106</sup>

In keeping with these findings, Henry’s later work states that absolute life should indeed be understood as a kind of transcendence. Paradoxically, though, this transcendence simply ‘means the immanence of Life within each living being’.<sup>107</sup> As Henry explains in *Incarnation*,

[b]ecause this immanence concerns the self-revelation of every living being, such as it accomplishes itself in the self-revelation of absolute life, it comes to its phenomenological possibility, and thus to its actual realization in the original passibility with which absolute Life reveals itself originally to itself. ‘Transcendence’ is just a word, still rather undetermined, for that essence.<sup>108</sup>

Transcendence is simply a name for the sense of affection in which each living self is given to itself, for the generative power that is qualitatively other than, and yet immanent to the flesh of the living individuals it engenders and sustains. Another way of putting this would be to say that the transcendence of absolute life has to do with the limits of the ‘I can’ of each finite flesh and what makes them possible.

Transcendence is thus not a matter of the relation of the embodied ego to the world or to an external object. The sense of transcendence in question here is not one that has to do with any kind of exteriority or ecstasis. Instead, it refers to the powers of my bodily life and its limits. Henry believes that the transcendence or excess of absolute life is in fact radically immanent to each living self because these limits are not ex-

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., pp. 204, 210.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>107</sup> Michel Henry, *Incarnation: une philosophie de la chair* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), p. 176.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

ternal but internal to each living self. The generative power of absolute life that goes beyond and delimits the powers of the living self only ever goes beyond them as their own internal and constitutive limit, as the limit that makes possible and continuously sustains the myriad powers of the living self.

Because of this, Henry contends that the dual sense of life does not contravene its immanence. God is, in a manner of speaking, in me more than me myself. He is the true reality and fount of my being and the perennial motivation for all that I do. As Henry provocatively puts this, '[i]n the depths of its night, our flesh is God.'<sup>109</sup> In response to the long-standing phenomenological problem as to who or what transcendental subjectivity is, Henry's later work unabashedly asserts that it is none other than a divine God, or, more exactly, the Christian God, the living Christ, the word become flesh. The primal significance of Henry's engagement with the being of the subject would thus consist in the revelation of the subject's divinity, in its participation in the absolute life of Christ. If we are to truly allow the being of the subject to come forward, and if phenomenology is to realise its destiny as a radical phenomenology, then the individual must be reborn to Christianity, she must come to realise that Christianity is radical phenomenology, that Christianity is the destiny of phenomenology, which has been awaiting it from the inception of humanity and of all human thought.

### 3.10 THE WORLD OF LIFE

Whether the generative movement of life is ultimately seen as divine or human, by putting each living self in touch with itself and all of its powers to sense, act and think, Henry finds that it constitutes and gives the subject an immediate and immanent knowl-

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<sup>109</sup> Henry, *I Am the Truth*, p. 373.

edge of the whole of its experience, including its experience of the world. According to Henry, the living subject enjoys an immanent knowledge of the world inasmuch as it experiences the latter as the correlate of its original bodily movements and actions. As Henry writes,

[b]y its essence, nature [i.e. world] is available to an original Body, that is, either the fluctuating correlate of a movement or its fixed limit. This ‘fixity’ is determined only in and through this movement. The Earth is not conceivable except as that on which we place or can place our feet, as the ground on which we stand. The ‘air’ is not conceivable except as that which we breathe or that which might burn us. No surface, volume or solid is conceivable except the one that we can touch. No light is conceivable except the one that shines in the subjectivity of our Eye. Body and Earth are joined together by Co-belonging (*Copropriation*). It is so original that nothing can ever occur in a pure Outside, as an object, for a *theoria*, as something that would be there without us — except as the history of this original Co-belonging (*Copropriation*) and as its limit mode. We will call this original Co-belonging (*Copropriation*) a Bodily-ownness (*Corpspropriation*). It is so original that it makes us the owners of the world.<sup>110</sup>

As can be seen here, while Henry regards the world as an illusion, he doesn’t deny that everything that is experienced therein is experienced as real within our flesh. The truth of the external world simply doesn’t belong to it. Rather, it consists in the way in which it is endured in our flesh. As John Mullarkey writes, “[i]llusions of transcendence” are real as immanent affect, but not as content. Or rather, their content is their form of appearing, which is immanent.’<sup>111</sup> Because of this, Henry can state that ‘the world is filled with [affective] resonances: all of the vibrations marking its repercussions in the soul and the spiritual action that they exert. In this respect, all matter — while seemingly dead — is a tonality and a living spirit’.<sup>112</sup>

Henry would thus appear to uncover a more original sense in which the subject belongs together with the world. On this account, as Michael Staudigl notes, the world

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<sup>110</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 45.

<sup>111</sup> Mullarkey, *Post-Continental Philosophy*, p. 81.

<sup>112</sup> Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, p. 138.



should not first be ‘understood in the traditional sense of “the totality of all things”, nor is it to be taken phenomenologically as the “horizon of horizons” [Husserl], nor is it even the “medium of care” [Heidegger]’.<sup>113</sup> Instead, before all else, the world is the correlate of the appropriating event that is the generative movement of life.<sup>114</sup>

Because the world is primarily there as the correlate of the movement of affectivity, the world can be experienced and known in terms of its resistance to our bodily forces or effort. To understand how this is so, we need to say a brief word about what Henry refers to as the organic body. When the force of the subjective body is exercised and expressed in a concrete action,

the body runs up against a first resistance. Its internal phenomenological systems give way to its effort and constitute our ‘organic body.’ These are not our group of ‘organs’ as they appear to an objective knowledge of some kind but precisely as we live them within our subjective body as the terms of our effort. These are the primal ‘configurations’ whose entire being consists in their being-given-to-effort and exhausted in it. Second, at very heart of this zone of relative resistance offered by the organic body, the pressure that weighs on it and gradually makes it give way, that is, the use of the powers of the subjective body, runs up against an obstacle that no longer gives way. The Earth [i.e. world or nature] is a line of absolute resistance that lets itself be felt continually within the organic body and is the unsurpassable limit of its deployment. Here again, the Earth is as we live it, that is to say as we experience it in our subjective bodily movement. It exists in the effort that pushes it back, defeats it, and breaks it apart.<sup>115</sup>

The organic body is thus our immediate, first-person experience of the relative resistance (i.e. limitation) that the subjective body undergoes in the use of its force or effort, and of the absolute resistance it encounters in the world. Because the organic body experiences the world as this absolute resistance, though, the resistance that the subject

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<sup>113</sup> Staudigl, ‘From the “metaphysics of the individual” to the critique of society’, p. 348.

<sup>114</sup> Henry’s insistence that the world belongs together with the movement of life as a co-appropriating event bears some similarities to Heidegger’s account of *Ereignis*, though, obviously, with the fundamental difference that, in the case of Henry, the appropriating event occurs without any trace of transcendence. For more on Henry’s account of this basic bond between body and world, see James Hart, ‘A phenomenological theory and critique of culture: A reading of Michel Henry’s *La Barbarie*’, *Continental Philosophy Review* 32, no. 3 (1999), 255-270 (p. 266).

<sup>115</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, pp. 44-45.

experiences in its flesh provides it with an immediate and immanent knowledge of the world.

Because the subject experiences the world in this way, Henry finds that it has a constant and *unrelenting* knowledge of the latter. That is to say, because every one of the powers that join body and world together in an original co-belonging is a ‘power of a flesh nothing is able to divide’, these powers provide each individual with an arch-knowledge or ‘immemorial memory’ of the world that cannot be broken.<sup>116</sup> In light of this, it is important to remember that the original bond between flesh and world is not dependent upon the transcendent sensible body that functions within the world and which receives actual sensory impressions. Instead, Henry believes that

[b]ecause the subjective originary body is constantly present to itself in this Archi-Presence of life to itself, the world to which it opens us through each of its powers, and notably by touch, is a world that also surpasses the actuality of the perception that I have of it at any given moment of my experience. It is a world that is potentially given to me because I can deploy the powers that give me access to it, because the paths that lead to the world are pre-delineated in me and I can follow them whenever I wish. I can touch things at any moment. This power is one with me and thus all of the things that compose the world are accessible to me in principle, inasmuch as I carry this power within me and coincide with it.<sup>117</sup>

The generative movement of life effectively places each subject in a constant communion with the world that is not dependent upon sensory impressions for its accomplishment.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, just as Henry’s work challenges the primacy of touch in Husserl’s account of how the subject comes to know its own body, so too it challenges any view that would uphold touch — or any of our ecstatic senses or any act of outer perception — as our primary access to the world. On this view, it is only because the living subject

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<sup>116</sup> Henry, *Incarnation: une philosophie de la chair*, pp. 207-208.

<sup>117</sup> Henry, ‘Incarnation and the Problem of Touch’, in *Carnal Hermeneutics*, ed. by Kearney and Treanor, p. 144.

<sup>118</sup> As Henry elsewhere writes, ‘[a]s its substrate, sensibility [i.e. affectivity] is the Whole of experience and thus the Whole of the world; the world is necessarily offered as a Whole in sensibility.’ Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 27.

first undergoes the whole of its experience in the immanent self-affection of life that touch and all of our other bodily senses and acts of perception are possible; and so, it is only because the subject first experiences and knows itself and the world in the primal self-affection of life that it can know these facets of its life by way of its senses and higher-order acts of apperceptive objectification.<sup>119</sup>

### 3.11 ORDERS OF CONSTITUTION

If we accept this account of the process of constitution, then Henry's work furthers our understanding of how the primal self functions in the constitution of itself and the world. Henry's work offers up some of those 'wanting names' for the hidden art of the soul and its essential structures. His work suggests that the most basic level of constitution should be understood as a matter of generation. Life is generative inasmuch as it produces itself in an immediate and immanent manner; it does not wait upon something outside itself to affect and set it into motion. Life affects and generates itself, and it is because it does so that the living individual comes into itself, and by doing so, into all of its powers to sense, act and think. It is because the living subject immanently comes into and possesses itself that the subject is put in touch with its bodily powers, with its ability to sense, perceive and reason about things, with all of these powers that open and make possible the transcendence of the world.<sup>120</sup> In this way, the radically immanent

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<sup>119</sup> As Henry writes, '[i]t is not by touch that we come to know touch.' Touching first comes to be known in and as the immanent self-affection of life. See Henry, 'Incarnation and the Problem of Touch', in *Carnal Hermeneutics*, ed. by Kearney and Treanor, p.143.

<sup>120</sup> Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 19, 21, 42, 57. See also Henry, 'Souffrance et vie', in *Phénoménologie de la vie, Tome I: De la phénoménologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003), pp. 143-156 (pp. 143-144).

appearing of life is said to found and makes possible the ecstatic appearing of the world (i.e. object-manifestation).

This serves to fill out and clarify our understanding of the process of constitution. Constitution can no longer merely be understood as a matter of sense-bestowal (*Sinngebung*), as was the case in Husserl. Rather, we find ourselves left with two fundamental levels of constitution: (i) that of the generative movement of affectivity; and (ii) noetic acts of sense-bestowal.

In line with this, it can be said that there are two forms of sense or meaning. According to Henry, life engenders ‘a completely different concept of *meaning*’.<sup>121</sup> What does this wholly new concept of meaning consist in? Why nothing other than the generative movement of affectivity, of course. More specifically, the primal sense of life consists in its unconscious drives and needs. Here we have a form of meaning that is not created or otherwise posited by consciousness, but which consists in the affective tonalities and unconscious tendencies of life.<sup>122</sup> As life endlessly engenders new impressions and encompasses the whole of our experience, including our experience of the world, Henry insists that this primal sense of life is not static, but dynamic and infinitely rich.<sup>123</sup> In turn, we then have the form of sense that pertains to noetic acts of consciousness (i.e. noematic meaning), which we outlined in the previous chapter.

While the primal sense of life founds the noematic meaning of the world, given Henry’s strict separation of the two modes of appearing, he states that life cannot cross over into, possess, or be in any way informed by meaning in the conventional sense. Since it contains no ecstasis and cannot relate to or represent itself as such, life cannot

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<sup>121</sup> Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, p. 294.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>123</sup> Henry, *Philosophy and the Phenomenology of the Body*, p. 92.

“mean” itself, or consequently have a [noematic] meaning in itself”.<sup>124</sup> Life cannot emptily intend or signify this or that; it cannot pose questions that would call for response or that would need to be fulfilled by something other than itself. Drawing on the poet Angelus Silesius, Henry states that ‘Life is like a rose: “The rose does not ask why. It blooms because it blooms. It cares not for itself, nor does it desire to be seen”’.<sup>125</sup>

Instead, Henry views the primal sense of life as double in structure.<sup>126</sup> Life, as the perpetual spring of all being, and the one and only true reality, appears in a duplicitous or two-sided manner.<sup>127</sup> The life of the living subject is effectively revealed in its reality within our flesh, and it is disseminated in an unreal manner in the transcendent images of the world. As Joseph Rivera notes, the ecstatic appearing of the world ‘operates according to the logic of imaging whereby the appearance of a thing is merely an exterior image of the thing-itself. Transcendence has the limited power to manifest the thing not as it really is but rather as images, reflections and exteriorizations’.<sup>128</sup>

Be that as it may, one might very well ask how all of this is possible? If the appearing of life is radically immanent and does not admit of any fracture or alterity, then there remains some question as to how life gives rise to the transcendence of the world. Henry states that this duplicity of appearing is simply an ‘Arche-fact’ of life, but this response leaves much to be desired.<sup>129</sup> While Henry indicates that the transcendental ego should be understood as the immanent affective manner in which the real, embod-

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<sup>124</sup> Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, p. 294.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. Cf. also Angelus Silesius, *Cherubinischer Wandersmann*, in *Angelus Silesius: Sämtliche Poetische Werke*, ed. by Han Ludwig Held (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1949).

<sup>126</sup> Henry, *Incarnation: une philosophie de la chair*, p. 217.

<sup>127</sup> Henry, *I Am the Truth*, p. 232.

<sup>128</sup> Rivera, ‘Generation, interiority and the phenomenology of Christianity in Michel Henry’, p. 226.

<sup>129</sup> Henry, *Incarnation: une philosophie de la chair*, p. 217.

ied subject experiences itself, whereas the empirical ego consists in the way in which one and the same subject appears within the light of the world, as with Husserl before him, he does not spell out how these two are unified and how they relate in sufficient detail.

### 3.12 THE ABSOLUTE PRIORITY OF AFFECTIVITY

An implication of this position is that the non-objectifying self-sensing of bodily life enjoys a level of autonomy and absolute priority that has been largely overlooked within the history of philosophy. As this account of the constitution of the world of life has begun to suggest, the primacy of affectivity is such that it marks the subject's first acquaintance with itself and the world of life as a whole. More than that, though, Henry contends that, in its absolute priority, life's non-intentional and non-objectifying self-sensing unilaterally founds and makes possible the objectifying and non-objectifying intentional acts through which we experience things.

On this point, Henry diverges from Husserl. At least in his early work, Husserl insists on the absolute priority of the intentional objectifying acts of consciousness over its non-objectifying acts, as well as its non-intentional feeling-sensations.<sup>130</sup> Within the *Logical Investigations*, he states that '[e]ach intentional experience is either an objectifying act or has its basis in such an act.'<sup>131</sup> On this account, non-objectifying acts, such as certain affective states (i.e. moods, emotions, feelings, etc), are founded upon objecti-

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<sup>130</sup> Though Husserl never regards such non-intentional feeling-sensations as the foundation of conscious life, at least in his early work, he does affirm the existence of such non-intentional experiences. For the early Husserl, there are both intentional and non-intentional feelings. Henry himself never acknowledges this point. Strange as this may seem, the reason may have something to do with the fact that Husserl eventually abandons the sharp distinction between intentional and non-intentional feeling, and instead suggests that all feelings are intentional in some form or other.

<sup>131</sup> Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume II*, p. 167.

ifying acts of intentionality (i.e. perception, remembering, imagination). Emotional experiences are dependent upon an intentional presentation of the object in question — upon our intentional familiarity with an object that carries the value-properties which the emotion reveals. In feeling admiration for a person, for example, said individual is an object of admiration because she is first the intended object of a thought or judgment. In fact, as a part of this, Husserl suggests that the intentionality of the subject's non-objectifying emotions and feelings is founded upon its objectifying acts. As a result, the intentionality of the former is seen as secondary, while the intentionality of the latter is primary.

However, the suggestion that the objectifying experience has an absolute priority over the subject's non-objectifying experiences is not well founded. The subject can clearly enjoy the salty smell of the sea or the appearance of sunlight before she objectifies and represents such things. Similarly, a young child can enjoy moving her limbs without having to first objectify the experience. The experiential facts of the matter suggest that the subject's objectifying acts do not hold an absolute priority over its non-objectifying acts.

Now, to be fair, as Husserl's work progresses, his position on this matter changes and becomes more complex. In his later works, Husserl begins to question whether it is in fact the case that the subject's objectifying acts enjoy such an absolute priority. As Nam-In Lee points out, at least in terms of their transcendental genesis, Husserl finds that such non-objectifying moods, emotions and feelings have 'an absolute priority against representational [i.e. objectifying] intentionality'.<sup>132</sup> As we have seen, it is the kinaesthetic sensations and other passive associations that serve as the building blocks

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<sup>132</sup> Nam-In Lee, 'Phenomenology of Feeling in Husserl and Levinas', *New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* 5 (2005), 189-209 (p. 204).

out of which the subject's objectifying acts are built. Moreover, as Lee continues, in the works that follow the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl

also admits the possibility that a feeling that is founded upon a representational intentionality can found another representational intentionality. In order to show that such a possibility really exists, he takes into consideration the fact that a person's aesthetic enjoyment of an artwork changes into a theoretical observation of the same work when considered from the standpoint of history of art. In this example, the theoretical act of an art historian cannot be there if it is not founded on the aesthetic act of enjoying the artwork as a kind of non-representational [i.e. non-objectifying] act. For this reason, one can say that the former is founded on the latter in the same sense in which the non-representational act of feeling the beauty of a flower is founded on the act of representing the same flower as a thing in the world, as is the case in the *Logical Investigations*. This example is a threat to the assumption that the representational act has an absolute priority against the non-representational act.<sup>133</sup>

There would thus appear to be at least some evidence that Husserl eventually came to some appreciation for the fact that non-objectifying affective states can and do found objectifying intentional acts.

Be that as it may, as Lee also acknowledges, even in these later works, Husserl 'still conceives of the analysis of objectifying acts as the most urgent task of his phenomenology. Thus he fails to incorporate the phenomenology of mood [and of emotions, feelings, etc.] into one of the most important parts of his phenomenology'.<sup>134</sup> While Husserl acknowledges that non-objectifying acts can have some manner of priority over the subject's objectifying acts, the latter are still afforded priority in terms of the overall importance they hold within the constitution of the subject's experience, and so, not surprisingly, they often figure at the forefront of his analyses, to the point that the former are left undeveloped and under-appreciated.

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<sup>133</sup> Lee, 'Phenomenology of Feeling in Husserl and Levinas', p. 203; Husserl, *Erste Philosophie (1923-24)*, p. 101.

<sup>134</sup> Nam-In Lee, 'Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology of Mood', in *Alterity and Facticity: New Perspectives on Husserl*, ed. by Natalie Depraz and Dan Zahavi (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), pp. 103-120 (p. 118).



With Henry, the decisive importance of non-objectifying affective tonalities in the constitution of the subject's experience is explored at length and is ultimately brought forward in a most dramatic manner. For Henry, the importance of the non-intentional and non-objectifying self-sensing of the subjective body does not merely consist in the fact that, in its absolute priority, it marks our first contact with ourselves and the world, or that it always founds the objectifying and non-objectifying intentional acts of consciousness. Though it is not always explicitly spelled out by Henry himself, his work harbours the suggestion that life, in its absolute priority, also drives the actions of the subject, and that it provides the latter with an absolute knowledge of all life and being.

As we will recall, Husserl maintains that it is objectifying acts of consciousness that largely carry out these functions. But if the effectivity of the primal self-affection of life does not depend on anything other than itself, then Henry's thought carries the implication that this non-objectifying self-sensing does not depend on noetic sense-giving — i.e. on the conscious positing of a goal — to drive its actions and to help it find its way in the world. To the contrary, inasmuch as the intentional acts of consciousness are but the unreal translation of life, it must be said that the former are always dependent upon and secretly guided by the latter, as though by an invisible hand.<sup>135</sup>

Moreover, if the life of the living individual does indeed function as a radical immanence, without any fracture or distance to admit of the possibility of error or doubt, then it must be acknowledged that the non-objectifying self-sensing of life can provide the subject with an absolutely certain, indubitable and infallible knowledge of

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<sup>135</sup> As Henry writes, '[a]s thought's ultimate possibility, affectivity reigns over and secretly determines all its modes.' Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, p. 29.

things in their absolute self-givenness.<sup>136</sup> Indeed, if we take Henry's account of the duplicity of appearing seriously, then it is necessary to acknowledge that it is the non-objectifying self-sensing of life, and not any manner of reflection or objective awareness, that alone can provide us with the absolute givenness of things.

Since life can never appear within the ecstatic mode of appearing to which it gives rise, and the latter can only ever seek to represent life in unreal and partial abstractions, Henry's work reveals and explicitly acknowledges that the primal event of life, as the absolute foundation of all appearance and knowledge, can never be absolutely given to our (inner or outer) sensory perception or thought. Despite this, to the extent that the intentional acts (i.e. perception, judgment, etc.) of the subject take their cue from the affective life that determines them, Henry nevertheless maintains that they will have at least some understanding of life, however imperfect, obscure or otherwise confused.<sup>137</sup>

With this in mind, Henry concludes that '[t]o want "to bring to light" the foundation is the ultimate ontological absurdity.'<sup>138</sup> Life can only be given absolutely in its own self-revelation. Returning to Husserl's statement that '*every experience whatsoever [...] can be made into an object of pure seeing and apprehension while it is occurring*',<sup>139</sup> as Jeffrey Hanson and Michael Kelly note, Henry insists that '[w]hat Husserl meant by "while it is occurring" was not best realised by Husserl himself', but only by his own phenomenology of life.<sup>140</sup> It is only within life, and not in reflection, that

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>137</sup> Michel Henry, 'Material Phenomenology', in *Quiet Powers of the Possible: Interviews in Contemporary French Phenomenology*, ed. by Tarek R. Dika and W. Chris Hackett (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), pp. 117-144 (p. 142).

<sup>138</sup> Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, p. 42.

<sup>139</sup> Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, p. 24.

<sup>140</sup> Jeffrey Hanson and Michael R. Kelly, 'Michel Henry and *The Idea of Phenomenology*: Immanence, Givenness and Reflection', in *Michel Henry: The Affects of Thought*, ed. by Jeffrey Hanson and Michael R. Kelly (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 62-84 (p. 79).

everything can be revealed in its perfect givenness while it is occurring. As Henry writes, ‘all possible reality, including the reality of nature, the cosmos, the other, the absolute and even God, only becomes actual by being situated in Life’.<sup>141</sup> Consequently, ‘[t]here is no longer any need to obey the Socratic precept “Know thyself.”’<sup>142</sup> In other words, true knowledge of oneself is no longer dependent upon reflective elucidation. Instead, ‘it is enough merely to cry’, to live life.<sup>143</sup>

Henry’s phenomenology of life thus attempts a remarkable reversal of tradition. As Hart remarks, while Husserl aligns absolute givenness with objective awareness, ‘for Henry, [such ecstatic] knowing is always inadequate, corrigible, and partial and can never serve as the way of access to philosophy as wisdom rooted in first principles. The bias of the tradition is to seek to establish first principles in [ecstatic] knowledge and to hold that immediate non-reflexive self-presence is incapable of providing us with such principles’.<sup>144</sup> With the unprecedented attention he pays to the pre-reflective, non-objectifying self-sensing of the subjective body, though, Henry has begun to harvest the untapped potential of affectivity, and makes the case that the latter is not merely a po-

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<sup>141</sup> Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, p. 94.

<sup>142</sup> Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 177-178.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. In each pain or pleasure the subject undergoes in the immanent experience of its flesh, the subject’s pain is always given absolutely; it is given and known absolutely in and as the pain itself, and not through any intention or objectifying relation. In Henry’s words, ‘[p]ain itself teaches me about pain and not some kind of intentional consciousness that would aim at its presence, its being there now.’ Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, p. 25. For further demonstration of this, we might momentarily return to Descartes. On Henry’s reading, Descartes’s example of the individual who is moved by his passions while dreaming suggests that, although what we imagine and represent to ourselves is false, ‘we cannot be misled in the same way regarding the passions, in that they are so close and so internal to our soul that it cannot possibly feel them unless they are truly as it feels them to be’. Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume 1*, p. 338.

<sup>144</sup> Hart, ‘Michel Henry’s Phenomenological Theology of Life’, p. 221. As Zahavi notes, though Husserl speaks of the ‘absolute givenness of our conscious experiences’, and denies that such acts appear ‘in *spatial* perspectives, he does emphasize the temporality of the act, and therefore acknowledges that it appears in *temporal* perspectives. That is, instead of conceiving of pre-reflective self-awareness as a truly immanent, non-horizontal, and non-ecstatic self-manifestation, Husserl treats it — according to Henry — as a givenness in inner time-consciousness, that is, as a givenness which is intrinsically caught up in the ecstatic-centred structure of *primal impression-retention-protention*’ — and in this sense, ecstatic knowing is always partial and corrigible. Dan Zahavi, ‘Michel Henry and the Phenomenology of the Invisible’, *Continental Philosophy Review* 32, no. 3 (1999), 223-240 (p. 229).

tential objectivity, but that which alone can provide the subject with the absolute self-givenness of things. While Henry thus departs from Husserl in explicitly acknowledging that the ultimate foundation of life can never be presented to our gaze, he continues nevertheless to insist that it is, and so, can be felt and lived.

To some extent, an account of this absolute knowledge may already be found in embryonic form in Descartes's study of the *cogito*. Yet, as we have begun to see, Descartes did not fully appreciate the nature of his discovery or its implications. He did not grasp the generative nature of life, the duplicity of appearing that obtains between life and the world, or the absolute priority that the former enjoys in guiding the latter and providing the individual with an absolute knowledge of everything that is.

In drawing out these points, it is Henry who clarifies the innermost nature of the absolute knowledge that philosophy has always sought. In revealing that the primal sense of life is not static and monotonous but dynamic and infinitely rich, Henry's work bears the suggestion that the pre-reflective and non-objectifying self-sensing in which the living subject knows itself and the world with absolute certainty is not a final and complete knowledge, but one that is endlessly changing. As Henry stresses in his later work, while the life of the subject is full, it is also incomplete, inasmuch as there is always more to give and learn.<sup>145</sup> Though Henry claims that his account of life uncovers the indubitable self-presence, the *Parousia* and absolute knowledge for which philosophy has always yearned, it is, in the last analysis, one that does not permit a final settling of accounts, a complete reckoning with who one is and how things stand, but one that sends the living individual on an endless journey of self-discovery.

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<sup>145</sup> Henry, *Incarnation*, p. 251. For a study of some of the implications of Henry's account of life as full and yet incomplete, see my article 'The Failure of Life: Michel Henry and The Ethics of Incompleteness', *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy* 21, no. 2 (2017), 208-229.

Nevertheless, Henry himself has yet to fully draw out the implications of this account of the transcendental life of the living subject. Though Henry finds that life is eternally wedded to itself, he acknowledges that, as a part of this endless journey, the absolute life that imbues the subject with a drive for self-growth and self-enhancement, and which provides her with an arch-knowledge of everything that is, can in some sense be occluded or forgotten, and can thus stand in need of being recovered. How all of this actually plays out, and whether it poses any challenges or problems for Henry's account of life, is something that we will still need to explore and assess.

## CHAPTER 4

### PUTTING LIFE TO THE TEST: CULTURE AND BARBARISM

In the previous chapter, we noted that Henry regards the generative movement of life as an endless journey that, in its absolute priority over intentionality, is wholly responsible for directing the individual toward her own self-growth and self-enhancement. This, Henry argues, enables the individual to somehow forget and recover her basis in absolute life. This chapter, in part, elucidates Henry's account of these movements or transformations. To do so, we will take up Henry's study of culture, that is, those acts or ways of living which enhance life, as well as its counter force, what he calls 'barbarism', understood as those acts which foster a forgetting of life.

Far from representing a different phase in Henry's work, the study of culture is the practical fleshing out and fulfilment of his theoretical reflections on the phenomenological life of the subject that guide his work from beginning to end.<sup>1</sup> As J. Aaron Simmons and David Scott put it, Henry's study of culture 'is where the theoretical phenomenological rubber meets the practical social road, as it were, or where Henry's material phenomenology of life's auto-affection meets the "rough ground", as Wittgenstein might say, of human existence in a cultural framework'.<sup>2</sup> By putting Henry's theoretical account of life to the test of our everyday cultural life, we will be able to critically assess in this chapter whether his own practical account of the aforementioned transfor-

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<sup>1</sup> As Jean-Yves Lacoste notes in his forward to Henry's *Words of Christ*, '[f]rom *Philosophie et phénoménologie du corps* — the first book he wrote, before *L'Essence de la manifestation* — to *Paroles du Christ*, the intellectual itinerary of Michel Henry followed a straight line.' See Michel Henry, *Words of Christ*, trans. by Christina M. Gschwandtner (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), p. ix.

<sup>2</sup> J. Arron Simmons and David Scott, 'Is there Life after Barbarism? Phenomenological Reflections on Science and the Future of the University', *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy* 28 (2017), 1-31 (pp. 2-3).

mations, as well as the things themselves, can in fact sustain and otherwise support his conception of life.

#### 4.1 SELF-GROWTH AS THE FOUNDATION OF CULTURE

Henry's work on culture has received little in the way of sustained attention, at least in comparison to other aspects of his work, such as his philosophy of religion. One of the likely reasons for this relative neglect is the fact that Henry's study of culture calls for a seismic shift in the traditional understanding of how culture arises and what it is. The cultural world has traditionally been understood as dependent upon the intentional regard and the conceptual and ideological constructions of the ego.<sup>3</sup> As Henry writes, '[i]nasmuch as culture is traditionally comprised exclusively of the group of significations delivered by language as a discourse, it is in fact this linguistic, mythical and conceptual culture based on the universe of representation and the symbolic or cognitive relation between the subject and the object.'<sup>4</sup>

In keeping with his account of the absolute primacy of life, Henry insists that culture arises from and essentially has to do with the affective movement of life, and not with intentionality and its objective works. In this sense, culture is an *a priori* possibility of life. Because the subject cannot escape life's unrelenting need for self-growth, Henry says that this need endows the life of each individual with a burdensome weight and an ever-mounting energy that it will need to deploy, not so as to decrease it, but so

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<sup>3</sup> Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, p. 74.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

as to it give free rein.<sup>5</sup> Life engenders culture as an attempt to do just this, to free the burgeoning energy of its flesh and to thereby realise its essence as a movement of self-growth.<sup>6</sup>

At its heart, then, culture is not about the intentional relation between a subject and its object. Instead, it is nothing other than life's movement of self-growth, its continuous effort to transform its self-experience, which is to say, its ability to feel, sense, act, think, and so on. As Henry explains,

[e]very culture is a culture of life, in the dual sense whereby life is both the subject and the object of this culture. *It is an action that life exerts on itself and through which it transforms itself insofar as life is both transforming and transformed.* 'Culture' means nothing other than that. 'Culture' refers to the self-transformation of life, the movement by which it continually changes itself in order to arrive at higher forms of realization and completeness, in order to grow. But if life is this incessant movement of self-transformation and self-fulfillment, it is culture itself. Or at least it carries it as something inscribed in it and sought by it.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, nonetheless, it is of importance to remember that this cultural movement is by no means blind or dumb; the identification of culture with life rather,

does not just signify that culture is the self-transformation of life. This self-transformation alone could only be blind. Inasmuch as it seeks growth, it must rely on a type of knowledge: *culture thus relies on another type of knowledge than that of science and consciousness.* This is the knowledge of life, and as we have indicated, life constitutes this knowledge by its own essence. It is the very fact of experiencing oneself in each point of one's being and thus this auto-revelation with which life begins and ends.<sup>8</sup>

Culture, therefore, consists in the immediate and immanent knowledge in which the subjective body finds itself bound and put in possession of itself and all of its powers,

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<sup>5</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, pp. 98-99. As Henry explains, to liberate the energy of our life is not 'to get rid of it, to provide an opportunity to dispense with it, to gradually decrease it and thereby to exhaust it and make it disappear'. Rather, '[t]o liberate energy [...] means to give it a free reign, to deploy its being, and to let it grow, such that the act of culture has no other end than giving permission to the Energy of growth, that is to say, to being itself: the auto-realization of subjectivity in the actualization of its auto-affection'. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.



and in which the living subject is given an absolute knowledge of how to live, move its limbs, eat, sleep, read, and so on.<sup>9</sup> While culture is a movement or praxis, this praxis must always be understood as the practical know-how of life.

It is because of this original know-how of the flesh that, for example, the subject can turn the pages of her biology book and, in an act of consciousness, read and comprehend the meaning of the theorems contained therein.<sup>10</sup> With this, Henry can be seen as providing a practical fleshing out of how the knowledge (i.e. appearing) of life necessarily serves as the foundation of all other forms of knowledge, in this instance, the knowledge of consciousness (in this case, the act of reading) as well as scientific knowledge (the knowledge contained in the biology book).<sup>11</sup>

If culture consists in this practical know-how of life, then we are left with a rather broad cultural world. On this reading, culture involves,

the set of enterprises and practices in which the overflowing of life is expressed. All of them are motivated by the ‘burden’, the ‘too much’ that prepares living subjectivity internally as a force ready to be dispensed and required to act under this burden. This situation — that is, the ontological condition of life — does not merely determine the great projects of culture, for example, the creation of mythologies as a distantiation from original fears and terrors, poetry as a ‘deliverance’, etc. It resides within every need, even the most modest and routine ones.<sup>12</sup>

Far from consisting merely in its high forms, among which Henry identifies art, ethics and religion, culture pertains to all of the subject’s acts, including — as lower forms of culture — its everyday production and consumption of goods, provided those acts serve life’s need for self-growth and thereby liberate its burdensome energy.<sup>13</sup> Thus, as Scott

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 12; Henry, *Incarnation*, 200.

<sup>10</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 100, 103, 126. As Henry writes, cultural acts are all of those actions ‘*that match our pathetic relation to being, are capable of expressing it, of growing with it, and thus of growing it, in turn*’. Ibid., p. 100.

Davidson points out in his introduction to Henry's *Barbarism*, 'there are cultures of food, shelter, work, erotic relations or relations to the dead', and so on.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4.2 THE ARTISTIC FORM OF CULTURE

As for how the needs and drives of life guide the subject in her everyday cultural engagements, Henry draws on the work of Kandinsky. The reason for this has to do with the shared ambition that unites their respective projects: like Henry, Kandinsky's work is guided by its attempt to draw out the value of the inner life of the individual. In the eyes of Henry, Kandinsky's development of abstract art is more than simply a particular movement in painting. What Kandinsky reveals, Henry claims, is that all art — indeed, the entire world of life — is abstract, which is to say that, in essence, both art and the world stand wholly outside the transcendent, visible world, and are instead exclusively guided by the a-cosmic 'laws of sensibility', by the movement of life, in its need for the growth of its self-sensing.<sup>15</sup> According to Henry, it is these laws that drive the actions of the individual, and which determine just how successful and valuable things are, thereby mapping out the various gradations of culture, from its higher to its lower forms.

A study of the feasibility of Henry's contention that life unilaterally drives the actions of the subject thus calls for an examination of these laws and how they operate. According to Henry, certain cultural practices are generally more adept at adhering to these laws than others, most especially, those of art. Art is said to offer the closest ap-

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. xv.

<sup>15</sup> Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, pp. 81, 25. Cf. also Ruud Welten, 'What Do We Hear When We Hear Music? A Radical Phenomenology Of Music', *Studia Phaenomenologica* 9 (2009), 269-286 (p. 278).

proximation of the laws of sensibility.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, Henry believes that the laws which guide and shape all of experience are inherently aesthetic in nature. Consequently, as Vincent Giraud suggests, Henry's thought can be understood as "aesthetics as first philosophy".<sup>17</sup> Given its privilege as an exemplar for all experience, our attempt to assess Henry's position on this matter will be best served by focusing on how art participates in and is guided by the laws in question.

Henry's contention that the subject's engagement with an artwork — in both its production and reception — is guided by the laws of life issues from his observation that such works, as an exemplar of all things, are first and foremost experienced in terms of the primal self-affection of life. To demonstrate how this occurs, we will limit our focus to the example to which Henry turns the most frequently and that he elaborates on in the most detail, namely, that of painting in fine art.

Drawing on Kandinsky, Henry notes that the content of a painting does not merely consist in lines, forms and colours as aspects of an object, which appear to the subject's regard as the "noematic" or objective colour' and form, and which, as such, are known in terms of what they signify or mean within the world's context of significance.<sup>18</sup> Such elements also appear in themselves, in the way in which they are first given in an immediate and non-representational manner as an affective tonality that is produced within our flesh.<sup>19</sup> In line with Kandinsky, Henry thus finds that a painting consists of external content — lines, forms and colours as they visibly appear to the

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<sup>16</sup> It is important to remember that, according to Henry, any laws of art, or 'laws of beauty', can only ever be 'an ideal approximation of [the] proportions and equilibriums at play in sensibility'. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>17</sup> Vincent Giraud, 'L'esthétique comme philosophie première', in *Michel Henry et l'affect de l'art: Recherches sur l'esthétique de la phénoménologie matérielle*, ed. by Aden Jdey and Rolf Kühn (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 41-64 (p. 41).

<sup>18</sup> Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, p. 71.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

subject's representational regard in the ecstatic world — and internal content — these lines, forms and colours in their immanent (invisible) pathos. In this sense, all cultural works, be they paintings or pastries, are not merely experienced as objects in the ecstatic world, but as forms of action — or praxis — in that they are suffered and enjoyed in and as the movement of life. In fact, in keeping with his account of the duplicity of appearing, Henry claims that the real being of such lines and colours — as well as sounds, smells, and all sensible elements of the world — consists exclusively in the affective tonality that is roused in the subject's flesh, and that noematic lines and colours are 'only the [intentional] projection of a sensation of colour onto the thing'.<sup>20</sup>

Lines and colours are therefore not determined by or restricted to the objective forms that appear to contain them on the canvas (just as notes and tones are not restricted in any non-representational musical composition in a musical score, in, for example, a work of *musique concrète*). As Henry writes,

[t]his opens the possibility for colour to break free from the limits in which form seeks to contain it. Knowing no barriers, overflowing the drawing, and exploding outside of the predefined space it was assigned until then, colour spreads out wherever it wants to, submitting only to its own force and its own volition. Where, then, does this pictorial imperative of delineating a colour by a form, its inscription in a form and its subordination to a prior outline come from? It comes from the world and its 'objective reality'. It is in the world of perception with the really perceived object that colour ends where the surface that it colours ends. The contour of the object is wedded to the limit of this surface, plane, or volume. The liberation of colour from external reality implies its release from the form of objects and all graphics in general; it marks the arrival of a new life, the life of colour delivered *to itself* [my emphasis] and *having become a pure pictorial form* [i.e. an affective tonality].<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 71. Consequently, the essential function of art cannot be to represent this or that, or to evoke certain socio-cultural significations, memories, or the like. Instead, it is to 'express' the invisible, to participate in and thereby arouse the inner movement of life. The creativity and tasks of the painter's composition with 'colours' compares more favourably to the non-representational expressive creativity characteristic of the musical composer's work with 'sounds' than to the (mechanical) production of a 'photocopy' of a 'real' object. Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

The liberation of line and colour from the objective forms that appear on the canvas, and from the worldly contexts of significance to which the latter refer, allows ‘a new form’ to be born, what Kandinsky refers to as ‘a “purely artistic form”, which confers upon the painting the strength necessary for independent life, and which is able to raise picture to the level of a spiritual subject’.<sup>22</sup> We find a striking example of this in the following passage:

it is possible not to take account of the letter’s purposes and to no longer perceive it as a letter but only as a mere form, a specific design composed of various segments organised in a variety of ways. When the linguistic purpose of the letter has been set aside, it is no longer a letter. It has become a pictorial form. A decisive event takes place then. Presented with this letter that no longer plays the role of a letter and ceases to belong to the system of language, the spectator experiences a new feeling, one that is different from what was felt in relation to the ordinary letter, a feeling so faint that it hardly seemed to be conscious. To the contrary, the emergence of an unknown form — the form of a letter that has never before been perceived in its purity and formal autonomy — provokes a particular impression, ‘happy’ or ‘sad’, ‘languishing’ or ‘proud’. This holds for the form of the letter as well as the linear segments that compose it. We experience this undetectable change at the basis of sensibility — the change from the almost unconscious tonality experienced with the linguistic sign to the much more lively, sometimes overwhelming, experience that the form of this sign as such stirs in us — for example, when we are looking at an alphabet that we do not know.<sup>23</sup>

As this indicates, the real being of all of the sensible elements of the world — i.e. of every point, line, form, colour, sound, smell, etc. — consists in their artistic form, which is to say, in the way in which they directly participate in, rather than merely mimic or represent, the affective life of the individual. Hence, as Henry writes, ‘abstraction’s re-

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 24; Wassily Kandinsky, *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, ed. by Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1982), p. 353. Suffered and enjoyed in the flesh of the subject, the lines and colours of a painting participate in its world of life, and in this respect they may be said to have their own independent life, their own flesh. See Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, p. 74.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 34. Henry finds another such example in the experience of a set of letters engraved on an Egyptian temple: ‘The visitor of an Egyptian temple who discovers its huge sections of rock covered with undecipherable writing feels the type of emotion that we are talking about. To be sure, this is altered and overdetermined by the fact that the visitor *knows* that this is a text, that the characters have a religious meaning, and that this mind, influenced by the sacred character of the place, is directed respectfully towards them. But the deception felt on the plane of knowledge cannot explain the gravity and plenitude of the experience. This is not solely a religious experience, since the sense of the specific content of the theological inscriptions is not known. It is primarily an aesthetic experience whose content [...] is the affective tonality provoked by the perception of known forms grasped in themselves and which are revealed to the visitor in and through this tonality.’ Ibid., pp. 34-35.

duction of the elements to their pure pictoriality signifies the reduction of the cosmos [and the world] to its true reality', which is to say, to its basis in life.<sup>24</sup>

It follows that the subject's experience of artworks — and so of things in general — is not determined on a merely psychological level. Henry writes,

[t]his equation of the original being of colour with its tonality does not only free art from the domain of objectivist and symbolic culture; it also dismisses every attempted psychological interpretation of art [...]. [Such an interpretation] claims that a tonality belongs to a colour on an associative level. Although psychology deals with the soul, the type of association that it uses and abuses takes us back to the world of representation. It provides a link that is based on spatial and temporal contiguity or objective resemblance. In such cases, exteriority is the basis of the associative connection. If it is reduced to this connection, the primal unity of colour and [affective] tonality is broken. It becomes an external relation depending on circumstances [...]. The brilliant insight of abstract painting is to reverse the psychological explanation and to show that all the associations organised around a colour, instead of explaining its particular tonality, depend on its tonality. The pathos of each colour produces the variable network of images that it typically awakens; the permanence of this tonality and its link to a colour explains all of its associations.<sup>25</sup>

So far as the real being of things, as well as their unreal external projection in the world, is engendered by the transcendental affectivity of life, to explain the tonality of things by psychological association is to mistake the original for the copy, the foundation for that which it founds. If we accept the absolute primacy of life, then any and all such psychological explanation of the subject's experience of the sensible elements of the world must depend upon and be explained by the tonality of the things themselves.<sup>26</sup>

In light of this, Henry argues that the theory of form and colour that emerges in Kandinsky, and that he draws on and develops, is founded philosophically, and does not

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>26</sup> Insofar as the being of all such lines, forms and colours is determined by nothing other than the transcendental life of the individual, an affective tonality cannot be said to be 'joined to colour or visible graphics [i.e. points, lines, forms] as the result of an association of ideas that would vary with individuals or depend on their individual histories, such as an infantile trauma that would give one a dislike of white and another a taste for black'. Ibid., pp. 35-36.

amount to a merely psychological explanation, or to ‘a creative yet vague poetic discourse’.<sup>27</sup> Instead, Henry says that ‘Kandinsky’s analysis operates in the same way as does Husserl’s eidetic analysis. It proscribes the foreign properties from the essence of art in order to perceive art in its purity.’<sup>28</sup> In effect, Kandinsky’s theory of form and colour provides a phenomenological insight into ‘colour’s [and form’s] own interiority to itself as a pure impression, or, what we have called its pathos’.<sup>29</sup> To the extent his descriptions accurately attest to the essence of things, they can be said to provide the subject with some insight into how particular lines, forms and colours are necessarily experienced by all human beings, regardless of the position they occupy, and the level of education or knowledge they have acquired, in the ecstatic world’s socio-historical context of significance.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4.3 A THEORY OF FORM AND COLOUR

While this explains how things are experienced internally within the life of the subject, we have still yet to work out in detail how these artistic forms (i.e. affective tonalities) can possibly account for the richness and diversity of experience. How is it, for example, that things in the world, whether an abstract painting of Hilma af Klint or a willow tree, affect me in the distinct way in which they do? To better understand this, let us unpack Henry’s elaboration on Kandinsky’s theory of form and colour. It is here that Hen-

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 35-36

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 74-75. In light of this, Henry claims that ‘those who build temples and sacred edifices and who decorate them with splendid ornamentation feel the colours of these decorations just as we feel them today. Colours exist *in the sole way in which a colour can be felt*: by blending with and being nothing but the sensation of the colour’. Ibid., p. 74.

ry draws out and develops his account of this matter in detail. Upon doing so, we will then be in a better position to fully understand and assess Henry's account of how life, as that which engenders and makes possible our experience of things, is alone able to constitute the laws that are responsible for guiding the subject in her engagements with the world.

Kandinsky's theory of form and colour consists in what he refers to as two 'great contrasts': that between hot and cold, and between white and black (or light and dark).<sup>31</sup> These contrasts result in 'three fundamental pairs of opposites: the straight and the curve with respect to lines, the triangle and the circle with respect to planes, yellow and blue with respect to colours'.<sup>32</sup> In brief, Henry sees Kandinsky as asserting that every force and 'drive within the framework of subjectivity has its immediate equivalent in a specific linear form, since the force's intensity, its changes, the time of its action, its interruptions and its returns have their exact corollary in the genus (straight, curved or zigzag line) and accidents (slope of the curve, length of various segments and degree of the angles) of the linear forms described above'.<sup>33</sup> For example, a 'point is stationary and expresses a feeling of calm', whereas lines are mobile and more boisterous.<sup>34</sup> In the case of the latter, Kandinsky distinguishes between straight, curved and zigzag lines. On this account, a straight line is 'produced by one single force acting on the point in a constant manner'.<sup>35</sup> As a 'straight line results from the initiative of a single, unopposed force, its domain is that of the lyric'.<sup>36</sup> Kandinsky identifies three kinds of straight

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. xi, 50.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 52.



lines: horizontal, vertical and diagonal. In his description of the inner content of these lines, Kandinsky identifies the aforementioned contrast between hot and cold. As Henry notes,

[t]he horizontal [line] corresponds to a primordial dimension of experience, the ground on which human beings stand, where they can either remain or move away. Kandinsky defines the horizontal as ‘a cold, basic support that can be extended in various directions’ and as ‘infinite, cold possibility of movement in its most concise form’. This stands in contrast to the vertical line, outwardly by its mark and inwardly by its affective tonality, which no longer offers the human being any touchstone or resting place, where the flat and the ‘cold’ are replaced by the abruptness of the ‘hot’. Kandinsky notes: ‘Thus, the vertical is infinite, warm possibility of movement in its most concise form.’ The third type of straight line is extraordinary: the diagonal is the true mixture of the former two in its external as well as its internal tone. Consequently, it is a union of ‘cold’ and ‘hot’ and offers the possibility of gradually changing the respective roles of these two tonalities through the infinite number of imperceptible gradations. To achieve this effect, the slope of the diagonal varies, tending either towards the horizontal or the vertical.<sup>37</sup>

On the other hand, curved and zigzag lines result ‘from the joint action of two forces. This situation can be distinguished depending on whether the introduction of the two forces is simultaneous or successive. Simultaneous action engenders a curved line, while successive action engenders an angular or zigzag line’, which, in keeping with the force of the successive movement that engenders it, ‘conveys a feeling of discontinuity’.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, when the forces of two or more lines ‘are present and thus enter into conflict, as is the case with the curve or the zigzag line’, we are said to pass from the realm of lyricism to that of drama.<sup>39</sup> That is to say, when lines are combined and mixed together they forge a dramatic dialogue that can liberate and give free rein to life’s need to transform itself and to grow in the way in which it experiences itself. As Henry

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 57-58.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. xi.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

states, '[t]his dramatic aspect increases and becomes more "hot", when the action of two antagonistic forces is simultaneous. It is taken to its paroxysm when a large number of forces come from all sides and fuel the battle to the point of making it a sort of cosmic clash.'<sup>40</sup> Therefore, lines do not simply arouse certain affective tonalities on their own. Because the being of all such sensible elements find their inner unity and sense within life, they can mix and thereby alter one another to arouse an endless variety of affective tones within the flesh of the individual.<sup>41</sup>

This same dramatic tension is similarly at play in the case of form and colour. In the case of the former, the opposing extremes consist in the form of a triangle and that of a circle. According to Kandinsky, the inner tone of a triangle is "high-pitched", "loud", [and] "shrill", whilst the circle has a 'concentric force [that] combines with the perfection of a continuous movement to give a feeling of the power and peace of eternity'.<sup>42</sup> As Henry states, the contrast between these forces 'is what makes the impact of an angle on a circle, an act of aggression and a dramatic conflict comparable to the greatest effects obtained by Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel'.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, in terms of colour, Henry, following Kandinsky, notes that

[e]very colour [...] potentially has four basic tones, since it can be hot — and at the same time light or dark — or cold — and again, light of dark [...]. In the case

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Since Henry maintains that all such sensible elements are ultimately engendered by and find their innermost unity within the immanence of life, which admits of no real division, he contends that the affective tonality of any given form or colour cannot be separated from the tonalities of other forms and colours. Therefore, when Kandinsky endeavours 'to display the discrete, autonomous nature of the element [i.e. 'the genus "red" or the essence of the "circle"'] and to recognise it as the true element of an analysis, this possibility only holds for its external aspect (for example, what is perceived by the mind as pure red when I say the word 'red' or as an isosceles triangle when I produce this concept)'. By necessity, then, Kandinsky's analyses always remain an ideal approximation of the affective experience of form and colour. Consequently, as we'll soon see, when an artist composes a work in an effort to express a particular inner content, in order to be as successful as possible, Henry believes that she must consider how a particular set of forms and colours will combine to express the inner content in question. Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

of heat, the movement goes toward the spectator, while in the case of cold it retreats. In the case of heat, the tendency is towards the colour yellow, while the general tendency of cold is towards blue [...]. Through experience, yellow is hot and has a horizontal, approaching movement, while blue is cold and has a horizontal, retreating movement.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to this description of its basic tones, Kandinsky finds that '[b]lue is the colour of depth, the "heavenly colour". It appeases and calms; it "calls man towards the infinite" and awakens "a desire for the pure and, finally, for the supernatural". As it moves towards black it becomes sad, while it becomes more remote and impersonal as it lightens.'<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile,

white is elevated far above the world and its colours [...]. It is an absolute silence, not a silence that is dead but one that is filled with possible things. This 'nothingness' precedes every birth and beginning. In relation to it, the sounds of all other colours 'become dulled', while many dissolve completely [...]. By contrast, black is a nothingness bereft of possibilities. It is a future 'without hope' and a death 'as if the sun had become extinct'.<sup>46</sup>

As with all of the elements we have been discussing, when two or more colours are present together, when they mix or play off one another, and when they are joined with respective tonalities of particular lines and forms, these tonalities alter one another and the tonality of the work as a whole. As Henry writes, '[g]iven that there is an infinite spectrum of colours and likewise an infinite number of forms — once they are no longer reduced to forms in the objective world — the possibility of joining external elements in order to give rise to corresponding feelings becomes inexhaustible.'<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 76. Describing yellow further, Kandinsky notes that it 'is disquieting to the spectator, pricking him, stimulating him [...] revealing the nature of the power expressed in this colour, which has an effect upon our sensibilities at once impudent and importunate. This property of yellow [...] can be raised to a pitch of intensity unbearable to the eye and to the spirit. Upon such intensification, it affects us like a shrill sound of a trumpet being played louder and louder, or the sound of a high-pitched fanfare'. Kandinsky, *Kandinsky*, ed. by Lindsay and Vergo, p. 181.

<sup>45</sup> Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, p. 78.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 78-79.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 84-85.

#### 4.4 ART AS NORMATIVE CULTURE

As the foundation and inner unity that engenders all of these sensible elements and makes their union and mixture possible, Henry believes that it is ultimately life itself that provides the criteria which determines just how successful (or unsuccessful) things really are — whether in the realm of art or, by extension, in our more mundane engagements in the world — and which therefore guides the subject in her actions and in her effort to further her self-experience.<sup>48</sup> Kandinsky speaks to this matter quite well in the following letter to painter and atonal music composer Arnold Schoenberg:

[e]very formal procedure which aspires to traditional effects is not completely free from conscious motivation. But art belongs to the unconscious! One must express oneself! Express oneself directly! Not one's taste, or one's upbringing, or one's intelligence, knowledge or skill. Not all these acquired characteristics, but that which is inborn, instinctive. And all form-making, all conscious form-making, is connected with some kind of mathematics, or geometry, or with the golden section or suchlike. But only unconscious form-making, which sets up the equation 'form = outward shape', really creates forms; that alone brings forth prototypes which are imitated by unoriginal people and become 'formulas'. But whoever is capable of listening to himself, recognising his own instincts, and also engrossing himself reflectively in every problem, will not need such crutches. One does not need to be a pioneer to create in this way, only a man who takes himself seriously — and thereby takes seriously that which is the true task of humanity in every intellectual or artistic field: to recognise, and to express what one has recognised!!! This is my belief!<sup>49</sup>

As this passage indicates, while there may be several elements that go into the construction of an artwork — the 'artist's personality', the 'style' and 'aesthetic postulates' of the time — it is the unconscious movement of affectivity that is principally responsible for determining how the external contents should be arranged in order to best capture the inner content in question, and for thereby providing the criteria for the success or

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<sup>48</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 100.

<sup>49</sup> Schoenberg to Kandinsky, January 24, 1911 ([http://www.schoenberg.at/lettersneu/search\\_show\\_letter.php?ID\\_Number=180](http://www.schoenberg.at/lettersneu/search_show_letter.php?ID_Number=180) accessed 10.03.2014. Also cited in Welten, 'What Do We Hear When We Hear Music?', p. 280.

failure of the artwork as art.<sup>50</sup> In other words, it is life that provides the *a priori* laws, or what Kandinsky refers to as the principles of '[i]nternal necessity' of the artist's self-expression that should guide the action of the subject in her composition of a work of art, and in her everyday engagements with the world.<sup>51</sup>

Now, it could be asked what gives life the authority to dictate the criteria by which actions are measured? Drawing on the work of Nietzsche, Henry claims that, in experiencing itself, the life of each individual knows itself to be good.<sup>52</sup> As Henry asks, '[w]hy is life good? Because in the self-suffering that constitutes it life's coming into itself is its delight in itself and as such pure delight. Happiness. Good! Happiness is good. Because life's essence contains happiness as its necessary product, it is good.'<sup>53</sup> Consequently, the generative movement of affectivity 'has value originally and unconditionally, and thus constitutes the principle of every possible evaluation and value'.<sup>54</sup> In this case, it is because life is this generative movement, because, in affecting itself, it produces the self and all of the powers and tendencies that it lives from and enjoys, that it has value in itself and that it knows itself as such. And it is because life has this inherent value that the evaluations and values it produces necessarily have value and count for something.<sup>55</sup>

Yet it remains to be seen exactly how this process plays out. Let us return to the exemplary case of fine art. For the individual who finds herself driven to express a certain internal content (i.e. affective tonality) or theme, Henry states that the inner neces-

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<sup>50</sup> Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, p. 25.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25, 27, 54, 98.

<sup>52</sup> Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 246-248.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 248, 276.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

sity of life generates ‘a principle form’, which ‘communicates its own tone to the entire work’, that is, to the myriad points, lines, forms and colours that are at play in the work in question.<sup>56</sup> In this way, life dictates that ‘composition consists in the subordination of all [particular] forms’ to this ‘principle form’.<sup>57</sup> That is to say, to successfully express an inner content, the artist should not simply throw an array of colours at the wall; she should not allow herself ‘to be duped’ by a particular forms beauty and value, or to introduce particular forms into the work owing to her personal psychological preferences.<sup>58</sup> Rather, her aim must be to adhere to the principle form and inner unity of the inner theme, and to thereby include only those forms that are necessary, and to arrange them in such a way that they mix and play off one another so as to express the principle form of the work in an optimal fashion.<sup>59</sup>

According to Henry, the essential role of life’s internal necessity in determining the success or failure of an artwork explains ‘the impression of necessity given by every authentic [i.e. successful] work, and the contingency, even the gratuity, characteristic of mediocre painting. The weakness of mediocre painting consists in its possibility of being otherwise — the result of this uncertainty is the indifference of a regard that is con-

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<sup>56</sup> Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, p. 98.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 98, 54. Though Henry acknowledges that it is impossible for an individual to perfectly express an internal content in the external contents of her work, it is therefore paramount to the success of any given work that the artist ‘recognise’ or remain attuned to her life, and that she harness all of her power and skill to express what she has recognised as best she can.

strained by nothing to reproduce a design from which it would no longer be able to turn away'.<sup>60</sup>

This provides us with a basis for understanding how life drives the actions of the living subject. In short, life carries out this function by not only founding and initiating the subject's actions, but, as we can now see, in making possible the norms and standards that orient her engagements with things. That is to say, life engenders the criteria by which she can immediately evaluate things and assign value to them, that propel the subject in one direction rather than another, and that inform her as to whether her actions are going well or poorly. In the case we have just laid out, for instance, life's need for self-growth initiates action on the part of the subject by engendering in her flesh an unconscious goal of expressing a particular theme in a painting. Simultaneously, life engenders the criteria by which she can feel and know how she needs to proceed in order to best express the inner content in question. In so doing, it drives the individual to create a particular assemblage of forms and colours rather than another. Upon following any given course of action, the subject can then review her work and, looking at it, undergo a certain pleasure where her actions have been somewhat successful in approximating the inner necessity of the inner content in question, and displeasure where they have not. As per the duplicity of appearing, the affective sense that the individual undergoes can then be translated into a sensible impression, and on the basis of this impression, the individual can form a judgment and come to objectively see the work she

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 25. Henry suggests that certain styles of painting can be more successful in participating in the *a priori* laws of life than others. He writes: '[w]hereas the purely artistic construction subsists on its own with the invincible coherence that comes from Inner Necessity, from the necessity presides over the choice of form — which no longer has or needs any external support — figurative paintings rely on external reality. Their pallid colours and loose forms collapse due to "formal indigence", once this support is absent. This is the case for all naturalistic paintings, including impressionism. The breakdown of these paintings, for example, when one looks at them upside down or when in some way or another their reference to the objective world is broken — which in the eyes of many constitutes the sole "sense" of painting — provides the proof that form derives its rigour and force from Inner Necessity and that, in spite of all appearances, it has no other possible content than life.' Ibid.

has produced as good or bad, etc. In this sense, as Henry notes, there are ‘two series of values: first, what originally has value before every act of evaluation and valorization [i.e. the movement of life]; second, the values that result from that act as the archetypal representation of that from which the act itself proceeds’.<sup>61</sup>

Of course, this process occurs not only in the realm of art, but across the breadth of our experience (i.e. in the art of logic, ethics, law, architecture, play and so forth). As we have stated, Henry views the living subject’s experience of art as an exemplar for how the subject essentially experiences all things in general. In his eyes, the unalterable laws that determine our experience of artworks (i.e. their quality or value) are also those that determine our experience of the world of life.<sup>62</sup> Abstract art, as Henry says, ‘is not opposed to nature; it discovers nature’s true essence’.<sup>63</sup>

In this case, the value of the objects produced in everyday life must similarly be determined by the extent to which they adhere to the needs of life. While the actions and objects that colour our everyday life may not rise to the level of art, they are nevertheless guided by life’s need for self-growth.<sup>64</sup> Since Henry himself does not elaborate on this in much detail, let us do so briefly now. As Henry acknowledges, life’s need for self-preservation and self-growth inscribes a wealth of goals in the flesh of the living subject — i.e. the need for food, shelter, companionship, etc.<sup>65</sup> In experiencing a chill,

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<sup>61</sup> Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, p. 248.

<sup>62</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 42; Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, p. 140.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>65</sup> As Henry writes: ‘life itself knows what it should do [...]. It does not know what it should do through rational knowledge but in its own way — not through the discovery of an objective field of quantifiable and calculable phenomena but through the irrecusable experience of its desire and its passion. Life leads individuals to work in order to feed themselves; it leads couples to be formed and societies to exist. Life is the true Reason. It assigns specific goals to human beings. It has initially constructed these goals in them, and they reside in the irresistible movement of their drives and their love — in the movement of life’. Henry, *From Communism to Capitalism*, p. 116.



for example, as a ‘subjective experience of discomfort’, the subject’s drive for self-preservation and happiness will condition and make possible a series of objectifying and non-objectifying acts that are bent on the achievement of this goal, and on ‘abolish[ing] its negative determinations, its “suffering” this discomfort’.<sup>66</sup> For instance, upon feeling cold, an individual may reach for a wool blanket, or make herself a warm cup of tea, or crawl into bed with her partner. Depending on the extent to which these practices, as well as the objective things or individuals, are successful or unsuccessful in meeting the given need(s), they will be experienced within the individual’s flesh in an immediate and immanent way as pleasurable or unpleasurable — i.e. as being useful or useless, good or evil. On the basis of the positive assessment of the blanket that the subject undergoes within her flesh, she will then undergo a similarly positive sensation within her sensible body, and ultimately come to objectively see the blanket as useful for warming herself, whereas other items, such as a desk lamp, will be seen as relatively useless.<sup>67</sup>

What distinguishes art as a high rather than low form of culture, is simply its ability to better adhere and give free rein to *life’s need* to further its self-experience. As Henry writes,

[w]hether it is a giraffe or a toad, a human being or a fish, an elephant or a mouse, creative forces in nature [...] seem to function in terms of the ‘principle of concentric construction’. Art, by contrast, opens the new possibility, unknown in nature, of an uncentred construction. As we have seen, this is how abstract painting conceives free straight lines; they are detached from the plane, ‘float’, and no longer have a relation to it or any of its points. Every constraining objective context has disappeared, and in place of the natural concentric layout, the sole re-

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<sup>66</sup> Michel Henry, *Marx: A Philosophy of Human Reality*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey McLaughlin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 97. As Henry further explains, ‘[e]ven when it functions with the apparent designs of procuring some advantage or removing some obstacle, the ultimate motivation behind its effort is the happiness that it experiences through the experience of its force.’ Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, p. 43.

<sup>67</sup> In this case, Henry’s work reveals that objects are what they because they either assist or hinder the needs and practices of the sensible body, which themselves are ultimately founded upon and experienced within the original praxis of life.

maintaining principle of construction is the subjectivity of the elements. Only their tone will determine their distribution and their assemblage.<sup>68</sup>

In the last analysis, insofar as artworks remain indifferent to all objective and practical meaning and adhere exclusively to the inner necessity of life, they enjoy a freedom and a level of rigour that is not generally known by everyday objects and things in nature. Where things in nature are often ‘muffled resonances that are inaudible due to the fact that they have already been heard’, or mired in ‘constraining objective [and practical] contexts’ of meaning that, in Henry’s view, distract from and thereby mitigate their affective tonalities,<sup>69</sup> artworks can produce configurations that are more novel and exacting in their adherence to *the movement of life*.<sup>70</sup>

In doing so, it should be noted that artworks do not merely transform and expand the subject’s life; they intensify her self-experience by adhering to and arousing her sentiments in a more rigorous and determined manner.<sup>71</sup> As becomes most apparent in Henry’s study of culture, the self-growth of life is not merely the transformation of the subject’s inner world, but an intensification of it. When it is done well, art intensifies the life of the individual by carrying it to its ‘extreme point’, to the “paroxysm of life”, where life experiences itself on its own basis, in which it is lost in this “impossible happiness” that Kandinsky calls “ecstasy”.<sup>72</sup>

To the extent living individuals pursue this way of life, the result is a cultural world. As Henry tells us, culture, understood as those actions that adhere to the needs of life,

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<sup>68</sup> Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, p. 139.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 42.

<sup>72</sup> Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, p. 19.

arranges the world in such a way that, in all its various aspects, it reflects this need [to grow]. That is, in and only in relation to subjectivity — for example, the seen in its relation with seeing — it puts subjectivity in relation with oneself in growth. Each construction refers to the fundamental need of shelter: each building, each tomb, each stele [or stela], each public building, each village, and even entire cities. In a cultural world, they are necessarily organized as the elements that allow life, in each of the human senses and more broadly in each power of subjectivity, to realize its essence. They allow one to see more, to feel more, to love more, to act more, even if it is only through an imaginary exercise of its powers of organic subjectivity — and thereby to realize the essence of subjectivity itself.<sup>73</sup>

As we can see here, Henry's study of culture reveals in a very concrete way how the movement of life is necessarily expressed in the world. So far as the living subject endures and abides by the needs of life, she will necessarily organise the elements of the world in such a way as to best meet life's need for self-growth. Put differently, in such a state, living individuals will tend to order and view things in terms of their use-value, in terms of their ability to meet the subject's needs and enhance or otherwise further her self-experience.

#### 4.5 THE RAMIFICATIONS OF NORMATIVE LIFE

Yet if this is so, then it is undeniably the case that objective cultural works, and the intentional acts that are essential to their production and reception, do play a positive, even vital, role in the growth of life. These findings cannot help but surprise us for a number of reasons. First, given that Henry insists on the absolute priority and independence of life, we might have expected that life would bring about its self-growth without needing to engage with objective works of any kind. We might have expected Henry to recommend that the subject instead engage in an ascetic lifestyle, that she retreat from all things and nourish herself in peaceful meditation. Yet since this is not at all

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<sup>73</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, pp. 102-103.

what we find in Henry, and the finite intentional acts of the subject and the objective works to which she relates do play a positive role in the development of life, there is then the issue as to how can this be, given that, as we know, Henry repeatedly claims, with a forcefulness that only grows stronger in his later years, that the intentional order of appearing tears everything from its immanent reality and thereby derealises it, effectively rendering it an extreme unreality? The way in which these two points — the supposed unreality of the intentional display of the world and its undeniably positive role in the growth of life — can co-exist is a genuine issue for Henry, and one to which we will return in due time.

On the other hand, this practical working out of Henry's position further demonstrates that he is justified in identifying the transcendental ego, as the absolute foundation of the normative and meaningful character of our experience, with bodily life. If, as Husserl suggests, the body were the constituted product of a more basic self-apperception, there would have to be a foundation, apart from the subjective body and its practices, of the norms on account of which the meaning of bodily life would be constituted. In line with this view, though Husserl did, to some extent, acknowledge that the process of constitution was a function of the embodied ego and its practices, he ultimately maintains that such practices can be studied in terms of acts of consciousness (i.e. acts of perception, willing, valuing, desiring, etc.).<sup>74</sup> On Husserl's account, it is a desire for warmth and comfort that motivates an evaluating perceptual act, wherein the wool blanket appears to the subject as useful. Together, these desiring and valuing acts motivate the subject to reach for the blanket in an act of will. As Steven Crowell states, while Husserl here acknowledges that the reaching for the blanket 'is a practical act that

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<sup>74</sup> Steven Crowell, *Normativity and Phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 160.

depends on my embodiment', he stresses that 'the meaning of that act is constituted in [and through outer objectifying-sense perceptual] consciousness'.<sup>75</sup> In his eyes, 'all that is spiritual [i.e. the world of meaning] is enclosed in a certain way in the nexuses of lived experiences [i.e. consciousness] of the individual human being'.<sup>76</sup>

This, however, would appear to be a highly problematic position. At heart, something appears 'desirable not because I desire it but because it appears to fulfil a need, and need is not an act; it is a bodily (or spiritual) condition'.<sup>77</sup> The wool blanket 'shows itself as useful not when I simply look at it but when I use it — that is, within a [bodily] practice that implicates it in a certain normatively ordered whole'.<sup>78</sup> If the living subject found herself in a different affective state, and engaged in a different bodily practice — say, trying to keep herself cool — the wool blanket would no longer be useful. After this occurs, Husserl claims that we can simply perceive the object in question as useful or useless. Yet, as Crowell observes,

such a perception cannot then be called upon to serve as the act-basis for experiencing the hammer's [or the blankets] utility in the original practice, and if that is so, this sort of utility — and the norms that constitute it — cannot be reduced to acts. Thus [bodily] practices cannot be reduced to acts of consciousness. The hammer is not useful because I desire to build a house; it is useful because it is the appropriate instrument for the job, and I can do the job entirely in the absence of the supposedly foundational act of desire. Indeed, I could very well desire to be elsewhere, to be doing something else, and so on.<sup>79</sup>

This suggests that the norms that make possible noematic meaning are indeed irrevocably tied to the skills and practices of bodily life, and that transcendental subjectivity, as the foundation of such norms, must be embodied through and through. Henry's study of

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>76</sup> Husserl, *Ideas II*, p. 371.

<sup>77</sup> Crowell, *Normativity and Phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger*, p. 162.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

culture draws out in considerable detail that it is because the living subject is engaged in particular practices that certain objects can be seen objectively as useful or useless; and, more basically still, that it is because the subject undergoes life's need for self-growth and finds herself driven by the original praxis of life that these practices can arise in the first place and really be successful or unsuccessful.

#### 4.6 BARBARISM AND MODERNITY

While this goes some way toward demonstrating life's ability to guide the actions of the subject within the cultural realm, it remains for us to see whether and how it can enable the living subject both to forget and to subsequently recover its basis in absolute life. Given life's radical immanence, which does not admit of any distance or alterity, how can it possibly tolerate and explain such transformations?

Henry's most detailed attempt to address this matter is found in his study of barbarism. Just as his study of culture serves as his attempt to flesh out his account of life as a movement of self-growth, barbarism is his attempt to render the forgetting of life incarnate.

In a very important sense, Henry's account of this matter has to do with his account of the ontological structure of life. As Steinbock notes, because life, in its radical immanence, does not reveal itself in the transcendence of the world, it 'can never become objective; and this [according to Henry] is what determines it as "hiddenness"'.<sup>80</sup> Life is an original hiddenness, understood as a 'hiddenness *to thought*'.<sup>81</sup> This particu-

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<sup>80</sup> Anthony Steinbock, 'The problem of forgetfulness in Michel Henry', *Continental Philosophy Review* 32, no. 3 (1999), 271-302 (p. 278); Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, p. 380.

<sup>81</sup> Steinbock, 'The problem of forgetfulness in Michel Henry', pp. 278-279, my emphasis.

lar hiddenness of life ‘is [thus] not related to a failure of thought, but to the essence itself, to the ontological structure of reality’.<sup>82</sup> So far as this hiddenness belongs to the ontological structure of life, it can be said that life determines out of necessity an ontological forgetfulness.<sup>83</sup> Because of this, when life engenders each human self and puts it in possession of all of the powers that make up its ecstatic existence in the world, it brands the existence of each self with what Steinbock calls an existential forgetfulness. This forgetfulness is existential in that it

is structured according to *existence as transcendence*, and existence [...] can do nothing else but transcend in perception and in thought, which is to say, can only lose itself in the world and forget immanence. Because thought is transcendence and aims at something outside the self, because it is in principle in the world, and because it cannot in principle achieve the essence which maintains itself outside exteriority, thought is condemned from the outset to forget immanence.<sup>84</sup>

Because the human self is passively given to itself in this way, Henry says that it can therefore, through the exercise of its various intentional powers, actively overlook or forget life — i.e. ontological monism,<sup>85</sup> or ‘historical forgetfulness’, to use Steinbock’s term<sup>86</sup> — and thereby mistake itself as the sovereign basis of its own being. This is what Henry refers to as the transcendental illusion of the ego.<sup>87</sup> It is this historical forgetfulness that he largely has in mind when discussing barbarism. In this case, as per the duplicity of appearing, culture and barbarism appear to stand in a binary relation,

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 279; Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, p. 386; Henry, *I Am the Truth*, p. 141.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 140; Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, p. 390.

<sup>86</sup> Steinbock, ‘The problem of forgetfulness in Michel Henry’, pp. 280-281.

<sup>87</sup> Henry, *I Am the Truth*, p. 140. Henry goes on to note how the transcendental illusion of the ego gives rise to a ‘system of egoism’, wherein everything is seen as serving the needs and interests of the finite ego. In this system, the ego effectively relates to the world in the mode of care (an obvious allusion to Heidegger). That is to say, the ego relates to itself by projecting itself outside itself and into the future, such that ‘it gives itself as a task “to realize”’, as a way of existing in the world that is always necessarily at issue, and about which it therefore has an inherent concern. Ibid., pp. 143-144.

where the latter tears the reality of the former from itself and renders it an illusion or unreality.<sup>88</sup>

When barbarism is in effect, the subject forgets its ‘*transcendental humanitas*’,<sup>89</sup> its true reality and provenance as a son of God. That is to say, the subject forgets that it is driven by the needs and primal sense of the one and only eternal life, and instead comes to regard its finite intentional acts, and the objectivity they make possible, as ultimate and foundational.<sup>90</sup> Henry thus regards barbarism as tantamount to a ‘revolution of the human being’, in that it gives the individual to overlook the singular and non-objective arch-knowledge of life in favour of forms of knowing and theory that are tied to intentionality and that unduly privilege seeing, objectivity and universality.<sup>91</sup>

Henry claims that an exemplary instance of barbarism is found in the modern world. In his eyes, the rise of barbarism in the modern world is associated with that of early modern thinking, specifically that of Galileo. Galileo’s thought effectively revolutionises the European way of thinking, and, Henry claims, it plays a prominent role in making it what it is. Galilean science asserts that ‘the knowledge that human beings

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 23. The strict opposition between culture and barbarism (i.e. scientism) is highlighted in Henry’s essay ‘Ce due la science ne sait pas’, in *Phénoménologie de la vie, Tome III: De L’art et du politique*, (Paris: Presses Univesitaires de France, 2003), pp. 41-51. Antonio Calcagno develops this point at length in ‘Reclaiming the Possibility of an Interior Human Culture? Michel Henry and *La Barbarie*’, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 44, no. 3 (2013), 252-265 (p. 262).

<sup>89</sup> Michael Staudigl, ‘From the “metaphysics of the individual” to the critique of society: on the practical significance of Michel Henry’s phenomenology of life’, *Continental Philosophy Review* 45, no. 3 (2012), 339-361 (pp. 353, 341).

<sup>90</sup> When describing the subject as having a special (i.e. immanent) relationship with God, in keeping with tradition, Henry employs the male pronoun, i.e. son of God. For the sake of continuity, we will retain his phrasing.

<sup>91</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 2. While culture and barbarism both belong to life as two of its a priori possibilities, Henry states that barbarism comes after culture. On this account, the becoming of the living subject’s inner world is at first thoroughly positive in nature, a purely unconscious movement of self-growth; and it is only later that barbarism sets in. As Henry writes, barbarism ‘is always second to a state of culture that necessarily precedes it, and it is only in relation to this prior culture that it can appear as an impoverishment and a degeneration’. Ibid., p. 5. Because of this, it was necessary that we first lay out and familiarise ourselves with Henry’s account of culture before taking up the issue of barbarism.



had always trusted was false and illusory'.<sup>92</sup> Of course, this 'knowledge is the sensory knowledge that leads us to believe that things have colours, odors, tastes, and sounds that are agreeable or disagreeable, in short, to believe that the world is a sensory world'.<sup>93</sup> Instead, Galileo maintains that

the real world is composed of un-sensed material bodies that are extended and have forms and figures. Its way of being known is not the sensibility that varies from one individual to another and thus only offers appearances, but the rational knowledge of these figures and forms: geometry. The geometrical knowledge of material nature — a knowledge that can be formulated mathematically [...] is the new knowledge that takes the place of all others and rejects them as insignificant.<sup>94</sup>

As Henry sees it, the Galilean science of nature (i.e. modern science or scientism) is thus eliminativistic. It represents a destruction of the basis of all reality in the original self-sensing and arch-knowledge of life, and a decision on the part of the living subject to abstract from and cover over the knowledge of life with that of geometrical-mathematical knowledge — i.e. objectivism.<sup>95</sup> In doing so, modern science promotes an eliminative ideology wherein it is the sole domain of appearing and knowing.<sup>96</sup> It minimises and distorts reality to nothing more than calculable physical matter, 'to an objective set

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. xiii.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. Henry's critique of barbarism seems to be influenced by Husserl's critique of science, especially as found in *The Crisis*, where he states that 'the reason for a failure of rational culture [...] lies not in the essence of rationalism itself but solely in its being rendered superficial, in its entanglement in "naturalism" and "objectivism"'. Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, p. 299. That being said, Henry does not make the connection himself, much less analyse it at any length. One reason perhaps being that, though the two accounts are similar, as Henry would undoubtedly see it, they are also far apart. Husserl views the crisis of European existence as a matter of modern science's 'weary' form of reason, which has caused it to turn away from the meaning of human existence and the freedom that is essential to it. For him, this weariness of reason can only be overcome in 'the rebirth of Europe through a heroism of reason that overcomes naturalism once and for all'. Ibid. As we will see, Henry, on the other hand, regards this crisis — which, for him, is not simply a crisis, but a destructive way of life — as having to do with the subject's forgetting of the primal sense of life, and with the drive to destroy itself that comes into life as a result. For Henry, life's urge to no longer live cannot be overcome by any heroism of reason, but only by returning and adhering to the needs and drives of life itself, specifically its need for self-growth.

<sup>96</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, pp. 26, 52, 106.

of material phenomena', such that something truly is if and only if it can be objectively measured and verified. The life of the subject 'as it is experienced in its uncontested phenomenality — this life that makes us living beings — is thus stripped of its true reality and reduced to a mere appearance [i.e. illusion, nonbeing]. The kiss exchanged by lovers is only a collision of microphysical particles'.<sup>97</sup>

At first blush, this cannot but strike the reader as an outright condemnation of science. Indeed, Henry states that '[s]cience as such has no relation with culture, because it develops outside its realm.'<sup>98</sup> Commenting on the relation between science and art in particular, he states that '[s]cience and art fall outside of one another. The heterogeneity between their respective domains is so radical that the very thought of a relation between the two is, at least for the moment, impossible.'<sup>99</sup>

Be that as it may, Henry's own analyses in fact do not support such a harsh treatment of science, and, indeed, he is not always as excessive in his negative assessment of the latter. Here, it will be helpful to recall our earlier remarks regarding art. As we've seen, contrary to his insistence that the intentional order of appearing is but an unreality, Henry's own analysis of objective cultural works such as paintings demonstrates that objective things can and do have a positive role to play in the enhancement of life. If this is the case, and if he is to be consistent, Henry cannot support such an outright condemnation of the sciences.

As a mode of knowing that is dependent on intentionality and its objectivity, the sciences may somehow harbour the potential to distract the subject from her life by giving her to mistakenly regard her actions as sovereign and by reducing being (i.e. appear-

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. xiv.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

ing) to being-seen, but it is only that — a potential. It must be possible for the experimental objectivity of the sciences to play a positive role in social existence. Indeed, in at least one place, Henry does suggest that it is not so much science as such that is barbarous, but only scientism, that is, the reductive practices of science in rendering life and human life in naturalistic terms. In his eyes, science only becomes barbarous when it becomes mistaken ‘as the sole existing domain of true being and subsequently leads to the rejection of the domain of life and culture into nonbeing or an illusory appearance [...]. [I]t is [thus] not scientific knowledge that is in question; it is the ideology joined to it today which holds that it is the sole possible knowledge and that all other ones must be eliminated’.<sup>100</sup>

#### 4.7 THE MODERN MARRIAGE OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND ECONOMICS

When this eliminativist ideology does rise to cultural dominance, as it apparently does in the modern world, the effects are said to be disastrous. Thus, for Henry, the barbarism of the modern world is ‘not just a question of a crisis of culture but of its destruction’.<sup>101</sup> If the modern world is an exemplary case of barbarism, then at heart barbarism must be defined by this destructiveness. To better understand how this modern distraction and devaluation of life proves so destructive to life as a whole, and not just human existence, let us take a moment to focus in on its modern incarnation. In Henry’s view, modern barbarism predominantly unfolds in the Frankensteinian assemblage of science, technology and economics.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

As with science, technology and economics must serve as forms of culture.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, in analysing the basic ontological relation of technology to human involvement with the world, Henry finds that technology is originally linked to the know-how or praxis of life in its co-belonging with the earth. Technology consists in the ways in which the subject acts *on the earth* to which it belongs in order to change it so as to best meet *its needs* — i.e. by digging into it, moving it, shaping it, etc.<sup>103</sup> As such, technology is simply ‘the realization of the original embodiment of earth [i.e. of the subject’s original co-belonging to the earth]’.<sup>104</sup> The tools that are invented to partake in this living work on the world are ‘originally nothing but an extension’ of the organic body, as ‘something that gives way to effort and is given in and only in that way’.<sup>105</sup>

Similarly, the economy is originally a matter of ‘householding’.<sup>106</sup> In other words, in a cultural world, the economy, as steeped in the demands of life, is arranged so as to keep the affairs of life in order. It understands the goods and services of society in terms of their use-value, which is to say, in terms of their ability to satisfy the needs of life and to help preserve and enhance its self-experience.

However, so far as human action grows forgetful of its basis in the normative context of life, then science, technology and the economy follow suit. What results is a convergence of these three elements of society in something of a perfect storm. As James Hart notes, in modern barbarism these strata of society come together to form ‘what Lewis Mumford (not Henry) calls the megamachine, i.e., a self-regulating objec-

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Hart, ‘A phenomenological theory and critique of culture’, p. 266.

<sup>105</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 45.

<sup>106</sup> Hart, ‘A phenomenological theory and critique of culture’, p. 267.

tive, worldly system with its own kind of teleology whose determination of the details and rhythms of our life in the world is pervasive but whose dynamisms are divorced from life as the first-person immediate self-experience'.<sup>107</sup>

We can see this today, Henry says, in the rise of 'the immense mechanical system of big industry, which can be reduced to electromagnetic currents of supercomputers and other high-tech machines of "techno-science", and which can increasingly function on their own, or with minimal supervision.<sup>108</sup> Similarly, it can plainly be seen in the shift of the economy away from use-value to exchange value and the unlimited production of profit (i.e. surplus value).<sup>109</sup> Where the value of work was once measured by life in its co-belonging with the earth, by the extent to which it served the needs of life and actualised its potentiality, it is now measured by its place in the market economy and by its role in the production of exchange and surplus values.

Of course, this decline in the basic value of life in the name of the so-called megamachine spills over and effects all aspects of culture. Henry finds an especially compelling example in the university. As Henry notes, the original vocation of the university was to fulfil the highest needs of life, its need to express itself and to grow in its ability to feel, act and think. In short, the university was to function as 'a creator of culture',<sup>110</sup> as a site whose principle and guiding task is to help enable one to enter 'into possession of oneself', and so, to become who one is.<sup>111</sup> As such, universities were 'constituted on a principle of marginality that was deliberate'.<sup>112</sup> So as to better fulfil its

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>108</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 47.

<sup>109</sup> Henry, *From Communism to Capitalism*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>110</sup> Simmons and Scott, 'Is there Life after Barbarism?' p. 23.

<sup>111</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 118.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

aim of fostering this flourishing of the soul (i.e. life) of the individual, as well as that of society as a whole, the university system was purposefully constructed in such a way as to allow it to stand apart from many of the social norms and laws that often apply to other sectors of society.

Today, it is not hard to find innumerable examples that demonstrate how this privileged marginality of the university is under threat of destruction. As Simmons and Scott note,

recent case law and public controversies concerning freedoms of speech, expression, job-security, gun regulations, etc., on college campuses all speak to the university's continuing, but often losing, struggle to maintain this marginality. While courts have recognised the need for lassitude in select academic practices, claims for what we might term 'academic' marginality have been more consistently rejected. Supporting Henry's point, the predominant trend at least with U.S. courts is in the direction of treating the University like just another corporation or (for public universities) government agency bound by the exact same constitutional, statutory and common law restrictions as those entities.<sup>113</sup>

With the rise of barbarism, the university progressively moves away from its original role as a 'creator of culture' and assumes its new lot in life as 'merely a reflector of the culture produced by the social forces concerned with externalities and economic status'.<sup>114</sup> Where the university once figured largely in the nourishment of the soul, fostering self-growth and serving as a 'constant check on the otherwise inevitable slide toward scientific abstraction' on both an individual and societal level, the university system now largely falls under its thumb, aiding and abetting the wealthy leaders of society

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<sup>113</sup> Simmons and Scott, 'Is there Life after Barbarism?' pp. 21-23.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

and their objectivist ideology, or else becoming ‘marginalised in the mundane sense of being irrelevant’.<sup>115</sup>

#### 4.8 THE MALAISE OF LIFE

Because the central importance of life has been covered over and demeaned, this barbarous revolution of the soul, and the world that is determined by it, prove deeply unsatisfying. As Henry suggests,

[i]magine a world where the organization of work is no longer rooted in organic subjectivity, where work is no longer the actualization of one’s powers through the immanent play of their inner disposition, their coming to themselves and thus the ‘liberation of their energy’. Then, instead of this feeling of liberation, a profound malaise comes to affect existence and numb it. Without being able to exhaust its being by reaching its basis in self-growth and in the intoxication of oneself, each need and motion remains only half-way to them and locked into a suffering that no longer goes beyond itself into enjoyment.<sup>116</sup>

Because the order of the world revolves around the economic logic of scientism that seeks to become increasingly autonomous, with little-to-no-regard for the needs of life, the actions and projects that the subject typically engages in seldom, if ever, serve the

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 24. One can find an example of this in the rising insistence that the point of university ‘is to prepare students for jobs in the “real world”’, where the real world is understood as by in large ‘synonymous with scientific and technological abstraction, but packaged as practically important for what really matters to our bodily comfort and material happiness’. Ibid., pp. 20-21. In attending university, the subject essentially prepares herself for attaining a favourable place in the sun (i.e. the light of the world), where she will be better ‘able to buy those technological devices that [now] give our lives meaning’. Ibid., p. 25. This critique, nevertheless, should not be taken as merely an elitist or idealistic critique of the practical and of the undeniable need for human beings to find work and to serve a function within society. Henry does state that, in the modern world, the university and society ‘face one another in a battle that can only be a struggle to the death’. Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 120. This follows from the eliminativist logic that guides barbarism and that makes it what it is, as a drive toward destruction and death. But, in keeping with our earlier discussion of Henry’s critique of science, it is not so much economic and societal concerns writ large that are in a struggle to the death with the university system and culture more generally. Rather, it is only insofar as these realms fall under the spell of modern science’s objectivist ideology that they necessarily function in a way that is deleterious to the life of living individuals. The point of Henry’s critique is thus not to diminish the importance of employment and the practical more generally, but to merely point out that it is only when individuals ‘are engaged in questions of meaning (of life)’ that they can ‘then understand why jobs matter’ in the first place, and thus well and truly position themselves for work and for a life in society that will actually contribute to the nourishment of their soul and that of society as a whole. Simmons and Scott, ‘Is there Life after Barbarism?’, p. 25.

<sup>116</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 103.

needs of life or rise to the heights of its powers, and so, its energy generally remains unspent.<sup>117</sup> Hence barbarism ‘*is an unemployed energy*’.<sup>118</sup> Barbarism is thus not only an unemployed energy because, as we’ve seen, its value, as well as its evaluative power, have been covered over, devalued and, as it were, laid off and replaced by another principle of evaluation (i.e. scientism), but because, as a result, it does not find a suitable release or expression. Because of this, barbarism effectively leaves the subject stalled in a brute suffering.<sup>119</sup> Rather than uplifting the subject, life now becomes an unbearable weight, a burden it no longer cares to endure. Life becomes weak and sickly in the sense that it now turns against itself and becomes bent on negating or otherwise destroying itself.<sup>120</sup> The movement of life, then, is one that can be *either* enhanced *or* impoverished.

That being said, when Henry states that the energy of life becomes unemployed and regresses into a kind of sickliness, he does not mean that it stops accruing in the flesh, or that it is in any way dulled. In his eyes, ‘a stoppage as such is never really possible’.<sup>121</sup> To be sure, one could very well raise the question as to whether there isn’t a certain slowing down to life? It seems odd, and yet perhaps very telling, that Henry has almost nothing to say of fatigue and illness. Instead, in a world of barbarism, Henry

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., pp. 19-20. As Henry goes on: ‘Men debased, humiliated, despised and despising themselves, trained in school to despise themselves, to count for nothing — just particles and molecules; admiring everything lesser than themselves and execrating everything that is greater than themselves. Everything worthy of love and adoration. Men reduced to simulacra, to idols that feel nothing, to automatons. And replaced by them — by computers and robots. Men chased out of their work and their homes, pushed into corners and gutters, huddled on subway benches, sleeping in cardboard boxes. Men replaced by abstractions, by economic entities, by profits and money. Men treated mathematically, digitally, statistically, counted like animals and counting for much less [...]. *Men* will want to die — but not *Life*’. Henry, *I Am the Truth*, p. 275.

<sup>121</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 102.



claims that the ever-mounting energy of the flesh is simply repressed. Nonetheless, Henry remarks that,

what this repression signifies is something that must be made clear. Energy is not put outside of experience, in a world behind the scenes or a night where all cows are black and where anything whatsoever can be said about what is repressed. Instead, energy remains in the repression. It is given to itself and burdened with itself, with a burden that becomes heavier at each moment. It does not change at any moment into the enjoyment of growth, inasmuch as no activity is aroused in the individual that conforms to its own activity. Immobilized within oneself, instead, it is delivered to and reduced to its pure suffering. It is experienced as something unbearable that it cannot withdraw from and cannot flee. This impossibility of fleeing oneself becomes anxiety. At the very heart of its repression, Energy remains intact along with its affect. Unable to bear oneself and changed into anxiety, one aspires to change into anything else.<sup>122</sup>

Under a more traditional understanding, repression would consist in the will's not allowing the memory of the individual to present contents to the intellect that would potentially threaten or disturb its integrity.<sup>123</sup> As we can see here, though, Henry has something altogether different in mind. On his account, repression consists in the qualitative modification or modulation of affectivity into another affect and, ultimately, into anxiety. In Henry's estimation, repression is thus 'the declension of that affectivity according to its own potentialities, so that they inevitably turn to anxiety as their common point, as their obligatory site of transition — one is tempted to say as their essence'.<sup>124</sup> Indeed, Henry does state that '[a]nxiety is the feeling of being, as life. It is the feeling of Self.'<sup>125</sup> So long as the pathos of life remains stuck (i.e. repressed) in a brute suffering that does not find fulfilment or joy in its self-experience, the subject grows only

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>123</sup> Such an account of repression can be found in the work of Arthur Schopenhauer. See *The World as Will and Representation, In Two Volumes: Volume II*, trans. by E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications), p. 208. For a similar account, see Sigmund Freud, *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Penguin 1995), pp. 28–29.

<sup>124</sup> Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, p. 305. Drawing on the case studies of Freud, Henry goes on to state that 'anxiety, site of transition and terminus of all affects, is life's medium of exchange'. Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

more anxious regarding its life, regarding this life that it knows it cannot escape and that has fast become an unrelenting and unbearable burden and weight.<sup>126</sup> For Henry, ‘anxiety, at the very heart of suffering and its increase, is nothing but the feeling of not being able to escape itself’.<sup>127</sup>

As the above long-form quotation suggests, though, the subject’s rising sense that she cannot escape her life only exacerbates her urge to escape it. The subject’s escalating anxiety thereby only drives her to redouble her efforts to flee. When this attempt invariably fails, this strengthens her feeling that she is unable to escape her life still further, which again leads her to all the more fervently try to throw herself outside herself, and so on, ad infinitum. Undoubtedly influenced by the Danish religious-philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, Henry thus views barbarism as a form of impotent self-consumption, one in which the subject’s inability to consume herself as she desires continuously incites her to ever-more frantic, coarse, and yet no less futile, attempts at escape.<sup>128</sup>

Henry thus understands barbarism as a radically different way of life, one that is essentially hateful and resentful towards the needs of bodily life, and that is bent on its own destruction and death. As this sickness grows, for instance, the subject may lean into the economic outlook that already colours her everyday life in an increasingly viru-

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., pp. 311-313.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 313. In this sense, anxiety is anxious about the drive of life itself (i.e. it has to do with the radically immanent manner in which life affects itself, without distance or the possibility of escape.). Ibid., p. 311.

<sup>128</sup> For Kierkegaard’s own account of this impotent self-consumption, see *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition For Upbuilding And Awakening*, trans. by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 18-19. Barbarism is thus not only a malaise, it is an increasingly hostile and violent action towards life. Drawing on the French psychologist and psychotherapist Pierre Janet, Henry notes that each time there is a renunciation of the higher activities in life — i.e. those that best serve its need for self-growth — such that there is ‘a falling back of energy to a lower level [i.e. to malaise]’, this ‘displacement that ought to signify a diminution and a subsistence of energy instead displays an explosion that gives lower behaviors an excessive, inordinate, and incoherent character. This turns them into excesses’. Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 105.

lent manner, and thus settle into the habit of weighing all of her inter-actions strictly in terms of what they provide her in return — a crude tit-for-tat way of being.<sup>129</sup> Or else she might try to diminish her subjective and aesthetic powers by losing herself in vacuous television, the internet, or by gorging herself on foods or drugs that provide her with a quick boost, or at least a momentary release from her pain, but which are ultimately harmful to her and her goals in life.<sup>130</sup>

The account of barbarism that this leaves us with is thus not really one of genuine forgetting or destruction. As we've seen, the intentional acts of the subject can distract from and devalue life; they can occlude and become hostile toward its needs; but they cannot ever truly forget or destroy them.<sup>131</sup> For something to be successfully forgotten or destroyed, some manner of fissure or transcendence would be necessary, which is refractory to life. However impoverished life may become, it is never truly lost; the subject has simply forgotten how to know and to cherish it. Henry acknowledges this himself in noting that

[t]he elimination of transcendental subjectivity by the Galilean project is never complete. Life continues but [...] in the coarsest ways: basic instincts are fulfilled without reference to a [higher] cultural model or a more demanding sensibility. Force is fulfilled in its most brutal ways; thought is reduced to ideological schemas, to shocking words and the weight of photos, in short, to collective representations that have become a faithful reflection of an existence that skims the surface.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Henry, *Words of Christ*, pp. 27-28, 37.

<sup>130</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 104. For more on Henry's account of television, see *Ibid.*, pp. 109-111.

<sup>131</sup> In this sense, Henry claims that the inability of barbarism to consume or destroy life as it wishes itself demonstrates, and serves as a proof of, the infrangible and eternal nature of absolute life.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

Even in barbarism, the aforementioned laws of sensibility are never fully extinguished.<sup>133</sup> In however marginalised and diminished a manner, they continue to operate and to afford the subject some manner of development,<sup>134</sup> but the opportunities for them to find adequate fulfilment becomes increasingly rare, to the point of being almost non-existent, and life becomes adjusted to scraping by in the most crude and base of manners. Rather than fully living (or dying), then, the modern subject passes through the world in a dogmatic slumber.

At the end of *Barbarism*, Henry debates whether living individuals can alone combat this regression of life. He acknowledges that such individuals ‘would like to transmit this culture, to enable one to become what one is, and to escape the unbearable boredom of the techno-media world with its drugs, monstrous growth, and anonymous transcendence. But it has reduced them to silence once and for all’.<sup>135</sup> Instead of great monumental works, Henry appears to suggest that all that those of the modern-day world can offer is something in a more minor key, such as, for instance, ‘brief words, quick instructions, a few references that isolated individuals communicate to one another

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid. As Henry writes, ‘[w]hen vital teleology is inverted into an economic teleology seeking the production of exchange values, these values do not in truth lose their connection to life. They remain secretly subordinated to use-values, and through them, to living work. Money is not only a representation to the second degree of this work (as a representation of abstract or social work, which is a representation of real or living work). It is a necessary investment in an actual process of production, its exchange against the use-value of raw materials and machines, and even more essentially, against the living work that is alone able to put into play this entire process and to produce the exchange value through it. This clearly shows that money never stands on its own. Even when it defines a new economic end in capitalism, it is always obligated to change into its contrary and to return to its source in life. At the end of the process, this is imposed again through the consumption that production cannot do without. In spite of everything, the stimulation of artificial consumption and the creation of new needs to absorb this production that has been deregulated by exchange value is controlled by artificial needs and, through them, by the subjectivity of life.’ Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 53. Sylvain Camilleri also highlights this point in his essay ‘Phenomenology and Soteriology in the “Christian Trilogy” of Michel Henry’, in *Michel Henry: The Affects of Thought*, ed. by Jeffrey Hanson and Michael R. Kelly (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 111-134 (p. 113).

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

er when, in chance meetings, they recognize themselves to be marked by the same sign [...]'.<sup>136</sup> For all that, he asks, '[c]an the world still be saved by some of them?'<sup>137</sup>

#### 4.9 SECOND BIRTH

In his very last works, Henry provides a response to this matter. He claims that Christianity may offer the means to overcome modern barbarism in that, as we'll see, it situates salvation not in reason or knowledge, but in bodily feeling and in a particular kind of action or way of life. In his words, '[i]t is not just any god today who is still able to save us, but — when the shadow of death is looming over the world — that One who is Living [i.e. Christ, the Son of God]'.<sup>138</sup> In keeping with the absolute priority of life over intentionality, Henry claims that the return of the finite self to its basis in eternal life — i.e. second birth — can only ever be initiated by absolute life itself. As he writes,

[t]his possibility which is always open to life, to suddenly experience its self-affection as absolute Life's self-affection, is what makes it a Becoming. But then, when and why is this emotional upheaval produced, which opens a person to his own essence? Nobody knows. The emotional opening of the person to his own essence can only be born of the will of life itself, as this rebirth that lets him suddenly experience his eternal birth. The Spirit blows where it wills.<sup>139</sup>

The living subject can only be reborn to her basis in the eternal life of God by virtue of the latter's grace (i.e. a free and undeserved gift).<sup>140</sup> In this case, as Rolf Kühn argues,

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Henry, *I Am the Truth*, p. 275. Here Henry is referring to a line from Heidegger's last interview with Rudolf Augstein and Georg Wolff in *Der Spiegel*, in which he states that 'only a god can save us'.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 192. Be that as it may, it should be noted that while this second birth allows the subject to overcome the historical forgetfulness of life, it does not enable her to overcome the ontological and existential forgetfulness that determines her being or way of life.

there is a kind of transcendental reduction at work in Henry. But, unlike in Husserl, where this reduction is a matter of the subject's freedom, it is here the subject's radical non-freedom, her passive suffering of the affective event and will of God's immediate self-revelation, that is solely responsible for drawing her back to the one and only true life and for thereby providing her with salvation.<sup>141</sup>

While the subject who has succumb to barbarism can always engage in the sorts of activities that are generally aligned with higher culture — whether engaging with fine works of art, or, presumably, reading Henry's own phenomenology of life — and may even find some sustenance therein, it is only when the grace of God alights upon the subject and initiates her rebirth that her experience of the objective work in question can erupt into an unlimited joy. In this sense, while the subject's actions, say, her engagement in a phenomenological reflection on life, can serve as a propaedeutic for an eventual rebirth, they cannot accomplish this rebirth itself. Notably, this means that, in contrast to Husserl, phenomenological reflection, or engagement with the history of ideas more generally, cannot provide the impetus for the radical transformation whereby the subject comes to fully know and attest to the ultimate foundation of life. As Frédéric Seyler remarks, the second birth of the self is ultimately 'dependent on a favourable moment [the grace of God] that would be the equivalent of *kairos* for radical phenomenology'.<sup>142</sup>

All the same, if we look to Henry's description of how this process actually plays out, it seems as though this second birth cannot be entirely random or fortuitous. As per his suggestion that art, religion and ethics serve as high forms of culture, Henry

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<sup>141</sup> Rolf Kühn, 'La contre-réduction comme 'saut' dans la Vie absolue', in *Retrouver la vie oubliée: critiques et perspectives de la philosophie de Michel Henry*, ed. by Jean-Michel Longneaux (Namur, Presses universitaires de Namur, 2000), pp. 67-80 (pp. 76-77).

<sup>142</sup> Frédéric Seyler, 'The Ethics of Affectivity and the Problem of Personhood: An Overview', *Analecta-Hermeneutica* 8 (2016), 218-234 (p. 227).

contends that the second birth of the self occurs through the living subject's participation in these higher forms of cultural action. The case of art we already know. In a favourable moment, the sensible elements of a painting or other such work of art can awaken the soul to its basis in absolute life.

Similarly, Henry contends that this experience of life can occur in reading sacred texts or scriptures. In *Words of Christ*, Henry draws a distinction between the words of life (i.e. the affective tonalities of the flesh) and the words of the world, that is, the speech acts that are structured according to the transcendence of the world, and that, as such, function as signs that refer to things other than themselves. Though Henry does not employ these terms, one can think of the word of life and the word of the world as performative and denotative speech acts. Where denotative speech acts involve a gap between the word and the thing to which it refers, which allows the speaker to take a stance on matters and to thus lie or be deceitful, the immediate self-referential nature of the performative act does not allow for any such gap, and so it cannot lie. Instead, it immediately produces itself as an undeniable (i.e. self-verifying) fact. As Giorgio Agamben notes, '[t]he model of truth here is not that of the adequation between words and things but the performative one in which speech unfailingly actualizes its meaning.'<sup>143</sup>

In keeping with the duplicity of appearing, Henry states that there is 'no relation whatsoever' between words of the world and those of life.<sup>144</sup> And yet, in other places he maintains that there is a connection between these two words,<sup>145</sup> and that, because the subject has largely forgotten life, she needs scripture to help awaken her to the word of

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<sup>143</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Sacrament Of Language: An Archaeology Of The Oath*, trans. by Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 55-56.

<sup>144</sup> Henry, *I Am the Truth*, p. 3.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

life that resounds in her flesh.<sup>146</sup> By informing the subject that she is a son of God, the words of the world that are harboured in the scriptures gesture toward a site where the word of life speaks.<sup>147</sup>

Once again, we see that, despite his insistence that the world derealises everything that appears within its ecstatic order, Henry's own analysis reveals that life in some way needs the objective words of the world. At the same time, Henry remains consistent in asserting that while the scriptures can play a positive role in the recovery of life, this recovery is always initiated by absolute life. It is always the word of life that somehow makes use of the words of the world in order to shake the subject from her dogmatic slumber and return her to her basis in life.

Henry also maintains that this revitalisation of life can occur by practicing the Christian ethos, by carrying out works of mercy or the Commandment of love, that is, *agape*, charity-love as described in the Gospel of John. In fact, since it is perhaps here that the second birth of the self is most plainly revealed as a different way of life, works of mercy seem to hold a certain privileged position in Henry's account of the matter. In his words,

*[o]nly the work of mercy practices the forgetting of self in which, all interest for the Self (right down to the idea of what we call a self or a me) now removed, no obstacle is now posed to the furling of life in this Self extended to its original essence. Forgetful of Itself in merciful actions, in this new action there is only its givenness to itself in the Arch-Givenness of absolute Life and in its Arch-Ipseity.*<sup>148</sup>

In turning the subject's attention away from her own life, pleasure and position in the world, charitable acts of mercy, such as giving food, shelter, attention and companion-

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>148</sup> Henry, *I Am the Truth*, p. 170.



ship to those in need, essentially serve to alleviate the subject's egoistic concern with herself as an object. Once again, we see that, on Henry's account, the overcoming of historical forgetfulness (i.e. ontological monism) is not overcome by remembering, or by progressing in one's study of certain types of knowledge, but by feeling and action, by the eruption of an immanent and affective action that, as Steinbock notes, practices *a new kind of forgetfulness, the forgetfulness of the self*.<sup>149</sup> Strangely enough, the historical forgetfulness that plagues the modern subject is overcome by another kind of forgetting,<sup>150</sup> the forgetting of one's worldly self and the crude tit-for-tat logic into which Henry claims it tends to devolve.

As the above long-form quotation suggests, by removing the intentional will of the finite subject, works of mercy practice (and reveal) the subject's very givenness to itself in the arch-givenness of absolute life. Therefore, it must be said that in practicing works of mercy, the subject does not merely mimic or adhere to a doctrine or model of conduct. The subject, rather, as Steinbock notes, lives

in such a way that the [ecstatic] *acts*, whatever they may be, bear the *essence of mercy*. To borrow a distinction that Scheler makes, one does not live 'like' Christ in the sense of copying the exterior operations (having long hair, being a carpenter's son, etc.), but living 'as' Christ such that whatever the acts may be (though they cannot be just anything) they bear inextricably the essence of or internal sense of that life, though they are irreducible to that essence.<sup>151</sup>

According to Henry, this means that in performing works of mercy, it is not me, this finite individual, who actually performs them. Since works of mercy are nothing more than the self-accomplishment of absolute life, '[i]t is no longer me who acts', but

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<sup>149</sup> Steinbock, 'The problem of forgetfulness in Michel Henry', p. 289.

<sup>150</sup> Michelle Rebidoux also makes this point in 'C'est Moi le Principe et la Fin: The Mysterious "Middle" of Michel Henry's (Christian) Phenomenology of Life', *Analecta-Hermeneutica* 3 (2011), 1-14 (p. 14).

<sup>151</sup> Steinbock, 'The problem of forgetfulness in Michel Henry', p. 292.

‘the Arch-Son who acts in me’.<sup>152</sup> It is no longer my-self performing acts of mercy, but absolute life itself. By the same token, when absolute life performs these works, it is not the other finite individual for whom or with whom it is engaged.<sup>153</sup> The true origin and end of life’s mercy and love is nothing other than life itself, in its radically immanent self-embrace — hence, a self-love.

This reduction of the self to its basis in absolute life thus abstracts each individual from her worldly existence and history. It reduces all of the living to what Henry refers to as the mystical body of Christ, who is neither male or female, father or mother, German or French, etc. In so doing, though, Henry claims that the living subject engages with others in the only way that lets them be known and valued for what they truly are — sons of God. That is to say, the living subject engages with others in the mode of life’s immanent self-generation, its gratuitous self-giving, which is the mode of (agape) love. For Henry, ‘Life is love’.<sup>154</sup> In acts of mercy, the subject loves others as she loves herself (as sons of God), in an unlimited and unconditioned love and generosity.<sup>155</sup>

As this begins to suggest, the way of life that is on offer here is one that threatens to overturn the exchange values and reciprocal tit-for-tat logic that is said to dominate the modern world. As Henry tells us, by no longer adhering so strictly to the norms of the world, to its crude calculations and exchange values — i.e. returning love only for love, hate for hate, retributive justice — the gratuitous or non-reciprocal self-giving

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<sup>152</sup> Henry, *I Am the Truth*, p. 169.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>154</sup> Henry, *I Am the Truth*, p. 223.

<sup>155</sup> As Henry reminds us, ‘the two famous commands of the Gospels, the two commands of Love’, are: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’”. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the *second is similar*: “‘Love your neighbour as yourself’”. *Ibid.*, p. 253; Matthew 22.37-38; Mark 12.28.

that is enacted in works of mercy invariably wreaks ‘division and discord where [societal normal] harmony and reciprocal love reigned’.<sup>156</sup>

Of course, none of this is done in a random or negative manner, by deciding to be hostile toward those whom one loves and loving toward those whom one hates, but, Henry says, by adhering to a deeper reason and by practicing ‘a new reciprocity’.<sup>157</sup> This new model of reciprocity is one that no longer hinges on the exchange values of the world, or on a shared ‘human nature’, political citizenry or psychological interest, but on the ‘interior relationship of each living being to the Life in which it lives’; and, in this manner, on the interior relationship that each subject has, ‘in this life, with each one of the other living beings who draw their own life from this same Life — which is his or hers and which is theirs, which is their life in common’.<sup>158</sup> By practicing the gratuitous self-giving of life (i.e. the will of God), works of mercy enable the subject to achieve a deeper and fuller sense of community and solidarity with others as fellow sons of life.<sup>159</sup> This community of life is salvation in the flesh; it is the way of life that is always at work at the heart of experience, even during our most impoverished of days, and whose rediscovery enables the subject to fully actualise her potential and to become fully alive.

Because this ethical way of life has its basis in the immanent sensibility of life, which is aesthetic in nature, Henry also characterises it as aesthetic.<sup>160</sup> By the same token, artistic practices, such as dancing, painting and so on, are also seen as ethical.<sup>161</sup> And, insofar as all of these actions put the subject in touch with the absolute foundation

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<sup>156</sup> Henry, *Words of Christ*, p. 33.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>160</sup> Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, p. 19.

<sup>161</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 126.

of her life, they are also regarded as religious. The sensibility of life must therefore be understood as aesthetic, ethical and religious in nature. While Henry does not develop this point, this suggests that there is a very real rapprochement between all of the high forms of cultural activity.

In this case, though, on Henry's account, the living subject knows and attests to the basis of her being in the simple living of life, his work bears the suggestion that it is this higher form of cultural action — i.e. this aesthetic, ethical and religious form of action — that enables her to overcome barbarism and to most fully come to know and attest to the ultimate foundation of her life. It is, in other words, when action is no longer approached in terms of the world, and the subject rediscovers its basis in absolute life, that she fully embraces and lives an absolute knowledge of everything that is. And, according to Henry, this is something that can only be achieved within the deep well of life's primal feeling, which does not require any assistance from intentionality.

As for the role of phenomenology in this process, Henry does not list it among the high forms of culture. In fact, Henry is highly critical of the privilege that is generally afforded to theoretical engagement in general, and of any suggestion that the achievement of true knowledge requires endless theoretical investigation, as in Husserl.

As he scoffs in *I Am the Truth*,

if you wanted to question the Gospel about the salvation of your soul, then you would not merely, as in Kierkegaard's ironic remark, have to await the publication of the very last book on the question, you would still have to put everything else aside and throw yourself into study, which death would surely interrupt before you could obtain from so many realms of knowledge and exegesis even the first word in an answer to the single question that matters.<sup>162</sup>

In Henry's view, there is no need for endless exegetical engagement because, as we've already seen, the primal knowledge of life is not dependent upon intentionality (i.e.

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<sup>162</sup> Henry, *I Am the Truth*, p. 3.

thought, etc.) and the subject's worldly engagements. It is life itself that initiates the subject's rebirth, and when it does so, as Sylvain Camilleri succinctly remarks, the interpretation of such texts 'comes to an end so that one may begin to live them anew. Understanding comes to an end by giving way to living. Why, exactly? Because these texts are objects waiting to have a genuine vocation in life and the communication of life rather than freezing in multiple interpretations of little use to existence'.<sup>163</sup> While there is nothing in Henry's work to preclude phenomenology from serving as a practice through which the individual may fully come to know and attest to the foundation of her life, this suggests that, in his eyes, it does not possess the same importance as the realms of art, ethics and religion in the fulfilment of this pursuit.

#### 4.10 RETHINKING THE UNITY OF AFFECTIVITY AND INTENTIONALITY

Nonetheless, Henry's account of this process is problematic in a number of ways. As Seyler points out, while the suggestion that absolute life is alone responsible for the transformation of life is 'perfectly consistent with Henry's foundation-thesis', it 'is problematic with regard to his philosophy of religion'.<sup>164</sup> Seyler goes on, 'if individual life is necessarily embedded in and living through *absolute* life, then it seems that the latter should be held ultimately responsible for the development of "barbarism", that is, for life's attempt to negate itself. But this is a consequence that Henry would clearly not

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<sup>163</sup> Camilleri, 'Phenomenology and Soteriology in the "Christian Trilogy" of Michel Henry', in *Michel Henry*, ed. by Hanson and Kelly, p. 116. In this sense, as Camilleri goes on, the 'cessation of the act of reading and interpretation demanded by Henry can nearly be likened to a new kind of 'the end of metaphysics', one which has positive benefits for the life of the individual. Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Frédéric Seyler, 'From Life to Existence: A Reconsideration of the Question of Intentionality in Michel Henry's Ethics', *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy - Revue de la philosophie française et de langue française* 20, no. 2 (2012), 98-115 (p. 102).

defend. It would, for instance, amount to God being the agent of his own forgetting and negation'.<sup>165</sup>

Now, one could attempt to resolve, or at least mitigate, this issue, as Seyler does, by acknowledging that life is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for barbarism, and for all of life's transformations.<sup>166</sup> Our analysis of Henry's own account of these cultural and barbarous transformations has revealed that the subject's intentional acts and their corresponding objects do indeed play an important role in all walks of life. In the case of culture, we have seen that objective cultural works, and the intentional acts that are involved in their production and reception, are necessary for the enhancement of life. Our study of barbarism and the recovery of life has borne out similar results: the intentional acts of the subject, and its objective productions, clearly play an essential role in these transformations. In fact, curiously enough, while Henry does generally overlook or at least downplay the role of intentionality and its objective works when it comes to the intensification of life, he is adamant in casting it as the villain when it comes to its impoverishment. This means that, despite Henry's reluctance to fully acknowledge this point, the various movements of life must in some way depend on the world, which is to say, on the intentional acts of the subject and their corresponding objective works.

Yet these findings appear to raise more questions than they answer. First, while the observation that life is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the transformations of life is consistent with his own analysis of culture and barbarism, it appears to stand in conflict with his insistence on the absolute priority of life. Seyler states that as a necessary but not sufficient condition for barbarism, life 'at least facilitates' the histor-

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

ical forgetting of life.<sup>167</sup> Yet if we are to take Henry's insistence on the absolute priority of life seriously, even if we acknowledge that the intentional act must be there for the effective accomplishment of the transformation in question, would it not be necessary to acknowledge that the originary impulse or initiative for any such transformation must always issue from absolute life itself, and that life therefore involves a drive for destruction?

Indeed, if we were to assert that intentionality is at least a factor in the accomplishment of barbarism, then there would arise the further issue as to how it can enjoy any such role, given that Henry emphasises throughout the course of his work that it is but a radical illusion or unreality. As Christina Gschwandtner states, '[i]f the world were purely an illusion in the extreme sense Henry occasionally suggests, it could not have the power of barbarity and evil he also claims for it. There would be no need to fight it as intensely as he does.'<sup>168</sup>

No less perplexing is the question we raised earlier in this chapter in our earlier study of art. If intentionality tears everything from itself and renders it an unreality, how could it and its objective works play a positive role of any kind in the intensification and second birth of the self? The problem is one of which Henry seems to have been at least to some extent aware: '[b]ut how affectivity is something that understands, how it is able to grasp and to live transcendent significations, this is what must precisely be explained, especially if, as we have claimed, nothing is so repugnant to the essence of feeling as transcendence, if the deployment of a horizon of understanding is that

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>168</sup> Christina M. Gschwandtner, 'How Do We Become Fully Alive? The Role of Death in Henry's Phenomenology of Life', in *The Role of Death in Life: A Multidisciplinary Examination of the Relationship between Life and Death*, ed. by John Behr and Conor Cunningham (Cambridge: James Clark & Co., 2016), pp. 56-75 (p. 72).

which is most foreign to feeling.’<sup>169</sup> To properly account for these matters, it would be necessary to detail how the immanent appearing of life gives rise to the ecstatic appearing of the world. As we observed in the previous chapter, though, Henry does not provide a sufficient explanation of this. It ultimately remains a mystery how life, conceived as a radical immanence, without any fissure or alterity, can possibly found intentionality and the transcendence of the world. The fact that, as we have now made plain, intentionality plays an essential a role in all of the transformations of life significantly reinforces the very real need to provide a more sufficient account of this matter.

Furthermore, though Henry is to be applauded for drawing out in considerable detail the prominent role that the non-objectifying self-sensing of the subjective body plays in the constitution of the world, a role that has not yet been fully understood and duly appreciated within the history of phenomenology, it should be asked whether it is in fact able to guide the subject in all of the complex issues that are involved in fashioning a work of art, or in assisting others in a charitable or otherwise ethical manner, or in simply living out our daily lives? As Seyler points out, ‘it is difficult to see how the [...] recognition of immanent life would translate itself *univocally*’ when certain complex decisions must be made on either an individual or a collective level.<sup>170</sup> Though Henry successfully establishes that the non-objectifying self-sensing of the subjective body plays a more prominent role in guiding the subject in its constitution of the world than has traditionally been recognised, further consideration of the experiential facts of the matter indicate that there must be at least certain limits on its ability to steer the subject and to translate itself into intentionality.

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<sup>169</sup> Henry, *L'essence de la manifestation*, p. 607.

<sup>170</sup> Seyler, ‘From Life to Existence’, p. 110.



This suggests that the finite (i.e. ecstatic) intentional acts of the subject cannot be wholly reduced to affectivity, and that, as Seyler similarly comments, the former, while being founded in affectivity, must nevertheless possess a certain ‘relative autonomy’.<sup>171</sup> Indeed, to return to the example of second birth, upon reawakening to life, can the subject really just become a vehicle for the will of the latter? Henry’s response to the sickness of life is facile. As important a role as the primal sense of life may play in our lives, it would seem to be the case that the subject must also think and reason her way through some of life’s more complex situations, at least to some extent. In short, the experiential facts of the matter indicate that intentionality must play a larger role in the life of the living individual than Henry suggests.

However, Seyler himself merely states this point, and no explanation is given as to how Henry’s thought might accommodate this position. If, as per the duplicity of appearing and the absolute priority of affectivity over intentionality, immanent life unilaterally founds and drives intentionality, such that everything that appears within the visible order of the latter is ultimately but an unreal reflection of the subject’s affective lived-through experience, then Henry’s thought cannot tolerate any autonomy on the part of intentionality. For the finite intentional acts of the subject to enjoy any such autonomy, it would be necessary for life to admit of some kind of fissure or transcendence.

So far as our first-hand experience requires us to acknowledge that the subject’s finite intentional acts have at least a certain relative autonomy over affectivity, and Henry’s work falls short in accommodating this reality, it must be said that his phenomenology of life fails to give due weight to the role of finitude in the life of the living subject. That is to say, Henry fails to duly recognise that the finite intentional acts wherein the subject interprets or in some way takes a position on things themselves stand as an es-

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

sential structure of life and its reality, and that they have a significant role in deciding the subject's course of action.

This reinforces still further the need to rethink the unity or relation between affectivity and intentionality. As we have seen, Henry reduces the subject to the eternal self-affection of God, who is neither male or female, Greek or Jew, and so on. As Bernet points out, this means that all of the finite and socio-historical features of the subject are effectively devalued

in the name of the condition of man as Son of God [...]. The human genealogy or generativity to which both Husserl and [other thinkers such as] Levinas have consecrated their most beautiful passages finds itself thrown back into the domain of the empirical and of the false evidences of the world. It is as if one had to choose between divine generativity and human generativity, instead of them illuminating each other mutually.<sup>172</sup>

In line with this, in his treatment of Christ, Henry is largely indifferent to the finite and contingent features of his existence, to the fact that he was a Jew, that he was born of his mother Mary, that he was, like all humans, not without negative or otherwise destructive impulses, and that he was ultimately crucified and died on the cross in Golgatha.<sup>173</sup> What largely interests Henry, rather, is the eternal nature of Christ, the angelic Christ who was not born of this world and who, like those who follow him, will never taste death.<sup>174</sup>

Strangely enough, while Henry criticises the history of philosophy for its ontological monism, and for putting forward an overly formal and abstract account of phenomenality — i.e. for understanding phenomenality as an empty form that neglects the affective content and reality of life — his own work proves to be guilty on both ac-

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<sup>172</sup> Rudolf Bernet, 'Christianity and philosophy', *Continental Philosophy Review* 32, no. 3 (1999), 325-342 (p. 338).

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Henry, *I Am the Truth*, pp. 152, 163.

counts. By construing the appearing of life as the locus of all reality, and by rendering the finite, intentional appearing of the world a mere illusion, Henry himself leaves us with only one real mode of appearing. In so doing, he leaves us with an account of life that ends up proving to be unduly abstract, and which ultimately fails to fully admit its destructive potential.

In order to remedy this, and to properly account for the essential role that intentionality — in all of its facets — plays in life, and that Henry's own analyses actually call for, it would be necessary to dissolve the strict division and heterogeneity between the non-intentional affectivity of life and the intentional display of consciousness, and to concede that life must itself possess an ecstatic formal structure. It would be necessary for material phenomenology to recognise that the radical separation that Henry imposes between affectivity and intentionality, life and the world, is a sign of an inadequate determination of appearing.

Despite some of his own conclusions, then, Henry's own analyses lead us in this direction. Perhaps the strongest push in this direction that issues from within Henry's own work stems from the increasing emphasis he places on the movement of life in his study of culture and barbarism as a matter of intensification and impoverishment. For how could the self know its life is intensifying, or growing more impoverished, if the living present were a matter of pure immanence, without any difference or division? As Hart correctly notes, life simply cannot sense itself growing more intense or impoverished unless it involves an inner differentiation or passive synthesis, unless it retains the experience of its former present, in relation to which the following moment can stand out as either an intensification or an impoverishment.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Hart, 'A phenomenological theory and critique of culture', p. 259. Because of this, Hart contends that 'Henry himself seems to be moving toward such a position [i.e. toward an acknowledgment of the ecstatic formal structure of life]'. Hart, 'Michel Henry's Phenomenological Theology of Life', p. 227, note 67.

When this point is considered alongside our earlier findings regarding the necessary role that intentionality plays in the productive and destructive movements of life, as well as the relative autonomy it enjoys, the result is clear and undeniable: Henry's own study of culture and barbarism, as well as the things themselves, reveal that the phenomenological life of the subject must admit of some manner of transcendence, and it must involve not only a drive for growth but a drive for destruction as well. In this case, the life of the human subject cannot be enjoined to that of an eternal God in a radically immanent manner. Even if we were to posit such an origin of all being, it would be necessary to acknowledge the distinct nature of human life, which would mean taking its essentially finite (intentional) and destructive character more seriously than does Henry himself.

## CHAPTER 5

### RETURNING LIFE TO THE WORLD

So far, we have argued that transcendental subjectivity cannot be properly understood either as absolute consciousness (Husserl) or as the eternal and radically immanent (generative) life of God (Henry), which does not relate to or depend upon the outside world. Transcendental subjectivity must rather be understood as the ecstatic movement of the finite bodily life of the actual human person that is always already open to and inextricably engaged in a historic-cultural world, and which possesses not only productive but also destructive impulses.

In leading us in this direction, though, the preceding study forces us to address the issue as to whether we can still make transcendental claims. Furthermore, since the hidden art of the soul can no longer be understood as a matter of generation, our study forces us to seek a name by which it might be properly called, and to determine how it functions in constituting the world. In releasing the life of the subject from its angelism and returning it to the ecstatic (intentional) appearing of the world, do we, as Henry contends, necessarily lose, or at least diminish the role of non-objectifying affectivity in this process, and reduce it to a subordinate position with respect to objectifying acts of consciousness, as in Husserl? This chapter seeks to address these issues.

#### 5.1 RE-CONCEIVING TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY

We recall that the transcendental realms which are accessed by Husserl and Henry are ones that are not restricted to the necessary and universal forms of human knowledge,

but extend to include those of knowledge in general.<sup>1</sup> In both cases, therefore, transcendental claims or truths render explicit the necessary and universal structures or laws that hold in all possible worlds.

That being said, since the only life we can access or experience is that of the finite, embodied person in her contingent, factual and historical existence in the world, this can no longer be the case. Cognition is invariably human cognition, and cannot speak to the necessary and universal forms of knowledge for all beings whatever. In that case, though, should we not abandon any pretence of reflectively elucidating the transcendental conditions of experience? From Husserl's perspective, this would indeed mean that the claim of phenomenology to explain the possibility of objective knowledge is relativised and leads to a dangerous skepticism and the possibility of the naturalization of human consciousness. For example, if, given the primacy of this worldly body, we suppose that the biological order and the general evolution of the human being have some bearing on the logical relations that set the standards and laws for knowledge, then it would seem as though this would undermine the necessity and universality of knowledge. If all normative 'logical forms and laws' are to some extent determined by the biological order of the subject and its evolution over time, then, as Husserl points out, it seems as though these laws would necessarily evolve along with her.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, if we maintain that logic, to some extent, depends upon the evolution of the human being, and thereby assert that the laws of logic are to some extent relative, then, as Mensch notes, this finding, itself a position based on logical inference, would necessarily un-

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<sup>1</sup> Husserl, we will recall, asserts that *eidetic-ontological* claims are valid 'not just for human beings, but also for God — as the ideal representative of absolute cognition'. Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 362. In Henry, meanwhile, the arch-knowledge of life is one that, similarly, is not only valid for human beings, but also for God and for all of the living.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Die Idee der Phänomenologie: Fünf Vorlesungen*, ed. by Walter Biemel (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p. 21; Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume I*, p. 147.

dermine itself.<sup>3</sup> The position in question thus appears to be a breeding ground for skepticism.

However, while the acknowledgment of the absolutely basic character of bodily life in its ineluctable bond with the world modifies and weakens the conception of the transcendental as presented in Husserl and Henry, it is not clear that it undermines it altogether. For phenomenology to continue to operate within a transcendental register, it would be necessary to demonstrate that transcendental claims still retain their own distinct modality, and that they still in some way bear the mark of necessity and universality. Moreover, it would be necessary to lay out a phenomenological procedure that enables the subject to elucidate these truths.

To begin our assessment of this matter, let us first try to determine whether, in light of the above considerations, transcendental claims can still retain a specific modality of their own. On the one hand, insofar as the life of the subject cannot be reduced to a pure consciousness or life, and always remains a human life situated within the socio-cultural world, transcendental conditions cannot be entirely separated from the level of empirical facts. On the other hand, as Samantha Matherne points out, while this means that there is necessarily more of a mutual enveloping between the transcendental and the empirical realms than has traditionally been supposed (e.g. Husserl, Henry), it does not mean that transcendental and factual truths are indistinguishable.<sup>4</sup> As Matherne notes, transcendental conditions can be seen as fundamental or absolute facts, which are distinct from sheer accidents.<sup>5</sup> Sheer accidents, Matherne tells us, are things that simply

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<sup>3</sup> Mensch, *Decisions and Transformations*, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Samantha Matherne, 'Toward a New Transcendental Aesthetic: Merleau-Ponty's Appraisal of Kant's Philosophical Method', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 27, no. 2 (2019), 378-401 (p. 393). Cf. also Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 229.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

happen to the subject, ‘where that subject [...] is “indifferent” to that fact. For example, there is a fact that pertains to how long my hair is today as compared to yesterday; however, this is something that has befallen me and that I am indifferent to’.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, fundamental facts consist in those structures or rules that, while contingent to the situation into which the subject has been thrown, are nevertheless essential to this factual life of the subject, and to the way in which the subject relates to her situation.<sup>7</sup> In other words, these absolute facts ‘shape our experience at the ground level. And it is this basic or ‘originary’ character of these contingencies that set them apart from accidents’.<sup>8</sup>

These fundamental facts are undoubtedly contingent in that they are relative to us, to the embodied human subject that we just happen to be, and who could well be otherwise, and who may be so at some indeterminate point in the future. As such, they cannot be necessary in the sense of being formal principles for all possible worlds, and yet they retain a sense of necessity all the same. They remain necessary in that ‘they have become necessary as the fundamental ways in which we take up our contingent situation’.<sup>9</sup>

As for the universality of such claims, there are grounds for supposing that such absolute facts should be characterised in this way as well. These fundamental facts can be called universal in that they form a part of the underlying nature and set of structures that are shared by all human subjects at this point in time, and which thereby enable each individual to experience a certain unity with him or herself, as well as with others

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 394. While acknowledging that human life is based upon certain contingencies, insofar as the subject has some understanding of her situation, Charles Taylor also contends that the subject can elucidate some of the structures and rules that are indispensable to her contingent life in the world, and to the way she takes it up. See Charles Taylor, ‘The Validity of Transcendental Arguments’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 79 (1979), 151-165 (pp. 163-164).



and the world more generally. Consequently, inasmuch as transcendental claims stand as those which render explicit these necessary and universal structures, they would retain a distinctive modality of their own.

Yet if this is the case, then what is the phenomenological procedure that enables the subject to accede to such insights? Let us momentarily return to Husserl's transcendental reduction. By attempting to suspend the intramundane contents of the world — i.e. the empirical world and the psychological ego who is involved with it — and to accede to an ontologically neutral position from which it may be possible to fully grasp the conditions of meaning and objectivity of any concrete experience, the subject encounters something that resists this manoeuvre, and which ultimately proves to be an insurmountable limitation on any such endeavour. In light of the centrality of bodily life that has come forward in our study of Henry, we can now assert that this insurmountable limitation is nothing other than the pre-reflective and non-objectifying bodily life of the subject in its co-belonging with the pre-objective world.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the subject can never entirely free herself from the natural attitude.

While the performance of the transcendental reduction thus fails in certain respects — i.e. in unlocking a realm that is wholly independent of the intramundane contents of the world — it is important to note that this does not render it altogether useless. The transcendental reduction remains successful in that it not only enables the subject to assume a philosophical attitude and to discover that her bodily life is defined by its involvement in the world, but to see that the world's existence, as inextricably intertwined with this pre-reflective and non-objectifying bodily movement, is always taken for

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<sup>10</sup> In other words, the performance of the transcendental reduction itself serves as further indication of the absolutely basic character of bodily life in its co-belonging with the world. As Merleau-Ponty notes, '[t]he most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of the complete reduction. If we were absolute mind, the reduction would present no problem.' Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. xiv, viii, xxvi.

granted by this reflective operation, and that any such reflection therefore depends upon conditions that always remain in the background, and so, out of view. The performance of the reduction is thus instructive in that it reveals that any reflective attempt to elucidate the presuppositions of experience itself has presuppositions that it cannot entirely seize upon or thematise and that, as a result, the proper and guiding object of phenomenology is to uncover — as best it can — the ways in which the objective world, and our higher-order objectifying acts, are founded upon the pre-reflective and non-objectifying sensibility of life in the world.<sup>11</sup> By bringing this to the attention of the subject, and by subsequently enabling her to attempt to reflectively seize upon the necessary and universal structures of her contingent life in its directedness towards the world, these procedures allow the subject to render explicit those fundamental facts that tend to be taken for granted and thus remain implicit within the natural attitude.<sup>12</sup>

In this case, in being led back to the ecstatic movement of human bodily life as the absolute beginning of phenomenology, we are not led to the ruin of its transcendental status. In acknowledging the absolutely basic character of this bodily life, we are still able to hold to the basic commitments of transcendental philosophy: we are still able to fashion transcendental claims that have their own distinctive modality, and we can still effectively elucidate these basic structures and rules via phenomenological description. However, we now do so by acknowledging that this methodology, and the claims it renders, presuppose and receive their defining limitation in the finite and contingent bodily life in which they are steeped. In this sense, our findings do not undo or

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<sup>11</sup> Contrary to Husserl's suggestion that it is always the objective world that is the proper object of phenomenology, we thus find that it is this pre-objective world that should be the primal concern and object of phenomenological description.

<sup>12</sup> When this existential-phenomenological transcendental reduction is performed after the eidetic reduction, the subject would then, as a matter of course, attempt to seize upon the essential features of her acts in their directedness toward essences.

overturn transcendental phenomenology so much as they open the door to its maturation.

## 5.2 THE HIDDEN ART OF THE SOUL

Yet in order to walk through this door, and to begin to demonstrate how this pre-reflective subjective body functions in the constitution of the world, we must put this methodology into practice. We must return to absolute subjectivity once more and endeavour to actually lay out some of the necessary and universal structures that comprise its inner nature. Let us pick up where we left off, with the living present, as the hidden art of the soul.

The previous chapter revealed that while this hidden art of the soul finds its source in the productive movement of life, this movement cannot be properly understood as a radically immanent self-generation. Indeed, Henry's growing emphasis on the living present as a movement of intensification and impoverishment provides at least some suggestion that he himself may have been moving toward a re-conception of the matter. Whether he would have done so or not, however, is, in some sense, moot, since his analyses, in contrast to his assertions, themselves point in this direction.

In this case, Henry's analyses point to a conception of the living present that would appear to be at least somewhat in line with that of Husserl. But here we must introduce an important qualification: while Henry's analyses draw him near to the living present of which Husserl tried to speak, Husserl himself never duly acknowledged the bodily origin of the living present. Therefore, it can be said that Henry's analyses point toward a relatively new conception of the living present, an affective living present that might have been, but which he himself never duly took up.

Be that as it may, if this conception of the living present is to be taken on to some extent, then we will first need to determine whether our experience of the body can indeed be aligned with this level of time. To do so, we must briefly recall Husserl's account of the living present. As we know, Husserl regards the living present as a fixed-but flowing form, which is pre-temporal, pre-individual and anonymous (i.e. inexperienceable and unsayable).<sup>13</sup> As this standing now has no position on a temporal scale, and cannot be characterised by the features of our individual experiences in subjective time, by those attributes that are in some sense common, and whose commonality on some level lends them to discursive presentation and discussion, it escapes conceptualisation and cannot be fully captured in speech. While the subject can nevertheless experience this standing now in an immediate way, it can only ever experience its own in this way, and never that of another subject (and vice versa). Therefore, as Mensch points out, the standing now is immediately experienced as my own in a 'uniquely singular' manner — as the immediate and unique first-person self-experience from which I constantly act.<sup>14</sup> And yet, because this is so, because the standing now is in some sense experienced, it follows that it can still be communicated in some way, however imperfectly. The standing now thus involves both a communicable and an incommunicable sense.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, since this living present not only stands but also functions as an endless (i.e. infinite) differential repetition or self-othering, the moment our reflective regard attempts to seize upon the primal now in which the subject always acts, we

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<sup>13</sup> In drawing the self back to this primal flow, we are thus left with a sense of self that stands at a certain remove from our everyday understanding of ourselves. We are left with the universal form and source of all intentional life, one which, as such, cannot strictly speaking be said to be exclusively mine, but which necessarily functions implicitly and anonymously within all human subjects.

<sup>14</sup> Mensch, *Decisions and Transformations*, p. 115.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 115-116.

find that it has already changed and slid into the past as a not-now.<sup>16</sup> In grasping it as an object that has slid into the past, we effectively lose the actual occurrence of the primal now as the source of all intentional life.

What remains for us to determine is whether the body can be seen as operating on this level. If we return to the things themselves, we find that our experience of our lived body is indeed consistent with these descriptions of the primal flow.<sup>17</sup> First, it can be seen that the constant presence of the standing now can be traced back to that of the subjective body. While the objects of the perceptual world of things emerge and disappear, the lived body, as an absolutely constant standpoint or centre of orientation, is always here, an absolute here. Though I can change my spatial position in relation to things, what remains constant and stable is the unity and absolute position of my lived body.

Drawing on this, we can say that the lived body is given as an absolute (pre-temporal and pre-spatial) position before there is any personal ego that can act (i.e. before the 'I can'). In this case, just as consciousness would not be able to apprehend its succession of temporal experiences as such and thereby order things in objective time if it did not stand in a fixed, pre-temporal position, so too there could be no motion or rest, no activity or passivity, or any self (as here) or other (as there), if my lived body did not occupy an absolute (pre-temporal and pre-spatial) position.

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<sup>16</sup> While the living subject is finite in actuality — i.e. in that it has to carry on from the particular position and perspective on the world in which it finds itself, it is infinite in principle, in the sense that, at its most basic level, the stream of consciousness functions as an open-ended horizon of possibilities. As László Tengelyi notes, the kind of infinite at play here is not that of an 'absolute infinity', in the sense of an "absolute totality" or an "unconditional whole". It is not an infinite that is exterior to consciousness, but one that is found within the finite itself, as transcendental subjectivity's open-ended horizon of possibilities. See László Tengelyi, 'Experience and Infinity in Kant and Husserl', *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 68 (2005), 479-500 (p. 492).

<sup>17</sup> James Mensch also makes this point. We are indebted to his account of this matter in *Husserl's Account of our Consciousness of Time*, pp. 242-243. More recently, Mensch touches upon this issue in his *Decisions and Transformations*, pp. 115-116.

This absolute position thus exceeds any distinction between subjectivity or objectivity, inner or outer.<sup>18</sup> It is, instead, the primal transcendence that always already opens the lived body to the world in the immediacy of its here-ness. As such, the absolute position of the lived body can be seen as the horizon of all horizons — i.e. as the shared, objective world. It is, as Alweiss notes, ‘the absolute stability of the world’, an absolute stability that precedes and makes possible time and space, and which makes possible all experience and intelligibility within the world.<sup>19</sup>

In keeping with this, it must be said that the knowledge of the subjective body — i.e. its pre-reflective and non-objectifying self-sensing — surpasses knowledge of my individual experiences in time and space, as well as knowledge of objects in the world. This bodily self-consciousness — this primal sense of life — also unfolds on a pre-temporal and pre-individual level, and is thus undergone as something that cannot be fully captured in speech. As with the standing now, this pre-individual bodily life is nonetheless experienced in a direct and immediate way, though, once again, it is only my own life that can be experienced in this way. Given the unique egocentric (i.e. first-personal) givenness of all human experience, I can only experience my own subjective body in a direct and immediate manner, and never that of the other (and vice versa), and so, in some sense it always remains unique to me.<sup>20</sup> The presence of my lived body can thus never be confused with that of another; it is always experienced and known by me in a uniquely singular way.<sup>21</sup> And yet, because this remains a kind of experience, as

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<sup>18</sup> Alweiss, *The World Unclaimed*, p. 160.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>20</sup> For more on this, see *Decisions and Transformations*, pp. 115-116.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

Mensch points out, the lived body also lends itself to discursive presentation to some degree, and so it too has a communicable and an incommunicable sense.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the self-alteration of the primal flow can similarly be traced back to the lived body. We know that the lived body is able to sense itself as an object. In the case of touch, for instance, the sensing body can touch itself as a physical object that exists in the world. In so doing, however, as Mensch similarly notes, ‘we lose it [the lived body] as a sentient subject — and vice versa. There is, in other words, never a merging of the two. We can never directly apprehend both together so that the one could be identified with the other’.<sup>23</sup> This is because in attempting to do so, the self-othering, which structures the now in which the subject always acts, drives an interval between them.<sup>24</sup>

In this case, it is the differential repetition of the transcendental affectivity of bodily life that constantly renews the primal flow and which makes it the pre-temporal event that it is. It is the transcendental self-affection of bodily life that makes possible the passage or transitivity of the living present, on which all intelligibility (i.e. all associations) and phenomenality depend. This life-drive, which is a drive for self-growth, thus remains an original and indefatigable spontaneity or movement.<sup>25</sup> Though a moment ago we indicated that this transcendental affectivity precedes all motion and rest, it is important to remember that we were here referring to movement within three-dimensional space-time. The movement of life remains irreducible to extension, or any divi-

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> As I have suggested elsewhere, the living present can thus be understood as similar in spirit to Nietzsche’s account of the eternal return of the same. See Schaefer, ‘The Issue of Novelty in Husserl’s Analysis of Absolute Time-Constituting Consciousness’, p. 983.

sion between inner and outer. Henry's insistence on the irreducibility of movement to the objective displacement of a thing in space can thus be maintained within the ecstatic order of appearing. This originally ecstatic and infinite movement is the immediacy of life in its exposure to a world before the subject knows itself as a moving body in the world. It is the appropriating event of this standing-streaming life in its co-belonging with the world; this event that constitutes the world, as well as all time and space.

Because the movement of affectivity functions as this differential repetition, though, we diverge from Husserl in acknowledging that the pre-temporal event of life stands as an unconscious domain, which, as such, is irreducible to intuition or presence. In this case, though, the primal event of life is not irreducible to sight because it functions outside the transcendence of the world, as in Henry, but because it is a past that has never been given as present, one that opens, makes possible and thereby belongs to the appearing of the world, as the otherness of our own being. Before I act — i.e. before the lived body is subject to my will — I have always already been as this unconscious movement of life. The living present functions as a pre-memorial, moving, affective bond with the world, which occurs before the sensing (i.e. presence) of any thing that might be sensed (i.e. present). The movement of life thus stands as a primordial transcendence that precedes and makes possible the immanence of conscious life, without ever being wholly contained or grasped within it.

In contrast to Husserl and Henry, then, it is necessary to acknowledge that transcendental subjectivity has a ground that can never be given absolutely. The pre-temporal event of life can neither be presented to our reflective regard (Husserl), nor can it wholly coincide with itself in a radically immanent and affective self-presence (Henry). Instead, life can only ever be felt in a vague or indeterminate manner. Nevertheless, the fact that the ultimate ground of transcendental subjectivity cannot be absolutely given is



itself an absolute phenomenological insight, in the sense that it can be absolutely given to our reflective regard.

So construed, though, the name for the transcendental life of the subject that was left wanting in Husserl cannot be that of generation (Henry). Insofar as the movement by which life comes into and affects itself is ecstatic in its formal structure, we propose that it be referred to as a matter of creation. Life is creation in the sense that, contra Henry's account of generation, the movement by which it produces itself — i.e. the primal sense of life — simultaneously opens, rather than closes the subject off from, the phenomenological distance of the world. At its most basic level, then, the process of constitution should be seen as a matter of creation. Consequently, the two basic levels along which this process unfolds are those of (i) creation (i.e. passive syntheses of affectivity), and (ii) apperceptive objectification (i.e. noetic sense-bestowal).

### 5.3 BACKGROUND FEELINGS

We have stated that life, as a pre-temporal event, has an affective bond with the world before the sensing of any thing. Exactly how this unfolds, however, and how it enables the subject to make contact with particular things, is something that still needs to be unpacked and explained. The flesh is bound to the world in the immediacy of its absolute here-ness. The primal event of life thus consists in the affective manner in which the living subject finds herself situated in her factual surroundings. Since life, in its original and all-founding drive for self-growth — i.e. a drive that make possible all others, such as the drive for food, sex, self-defence, curiosity, etc. — functions as an impulsive striving toward something, as a pattern of action that is intensely directed toward a pole at which it aims, and which is bent on its satisfaction, the living subject finds herself at-

tuned or affectively disposed to the world in particular ways. Here, these attunements (i.e. affective dispositions), or what we will also refer to as implicit background feelings, should be understood as the affective relation in which the subject currently stands with respect to the world. In other words, such background feelings consist in the fundamental felt relation of self and world, in the feeling of oneself in relation to the world. As such, background feelings serve as the foil against whose continuum particular affects stand out as ‘eruptive peaks’.<sup>26</sup>

Matthew Ratcliffe has developed a theoretical account of affectivity that is in some respects similar to the sense of self-affection we have in mind here. Ratcliffe, whose work on this matter is a development of insights found in Antonio Damasio and Heidegger,<sup>27</sup> characterises these background feelings — or ‘existential feelings’, as he calls them — as follows:

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<sup>26</sup> Jan Slaby and Achim Stephan, ‘Affective intentionality and self-consciousness’, *Consciousness and Cognition* 17, no. 2 (2008), 506-513 (p. 512).

<sup>27</sup> While the accounts of attunements or background feelings found in the work of contemporary figures such as Ratcliffe and Slaby have in some respects been influenced by the work of Heidegger, it should be noted that Heidegger’s own account of this matter is not without its shortcomings. Famously, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger does not address the role of the body in Dasein’s way of existing, despite the fact that he places considerable emphasis on practical activity, which suggests that the body should hold at least a certain place in his analyses. There have been various accounts as to why Heidegger may have opted to forgo any substantial discussion of the body in this work. We cannot — and need not — weigh in on this matter here. That being said, let us note that some commentators, such as Robert Stolorow, argue that Heidegger did not actually overlook the ontological significance of the lived body in this early work, but that he actually situated it at the centre of Dasein’s disclosedness in his discussion of mood. Robert D. Stolorow, ‘Heidegger, Mood and the Lived Body: The Ontical and the Ontological’, *Janus Head: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature, Continental Philosophy, Phenomenological Psychology, and the Arts* 13, no. 12 (2014), 5-11. On this point, let us make two brief comments: (i) even if we were to accept Stolorow’s suggestion, though Heidegger insists on the central importance of affectivity in Dasein’s disclosedness, he appears to in fact privilege understanding over affectivity or mood in his existential analytic of Dasein. As Daniel Dahlstrom puts this, Heidegger ‘talks the talk’, but ‘does he walk the walk? [...] Does he incorporate affectivity effectively and sufficiently into his existential analysis?’ Dahlstrom suggests — and we would tend to agree — that he does not, and ‘that affectivity is missing in action, in some cases conspicuously, perhaps even egregiously, from Heidegger’s existential analysis in *Being and Time*. I say “egregiously” because the absence of an account of the relevant affectivity imperils, by his own account, the integrity of the analysis’. Daniel O. Dahlstrom, ‘Missing in Action: Affectivity in *Being and Time*’, in *Heidegger on Affect*, ed. by Christof Hadjioannou (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 105-125 (p. 111). (ii) In Heidegger’s late work in the *Zollikon Seminars*, which marks his only attempt to provide at least a somewhat more substantial treatment of this issue, and where, if Stolorow is correct, one would expect to find a more extensive treatment of the relation between affectivity and the lived body, to some surprise, one finds nothing of the kind. While in this work Heidegger discusses the lived body’s relation to spatiality, there is not a single mention of its relation to affectivity, which seems very odd indeed.

[t]he world can sometimes appear unfamiliar, unreal, distant or close. It can be something that one feels apart from or at one with. One can feel in control of one's situation as a whole or overwhelmed by it. One can feel like a participant in the world or like a detached, estranged observer, staring at object that do not feel quite 'there'. Such relationships structure all experiences. Whenever one has a specific experience of oneself, another person or an inanimate object being a certain way, the experience has, as a background, a more general sense of one's relationship with the world. This relationship does not simply consist in an experience of being an entity that occupies a spatial and temporal location, alongside a host of other entities. Ways of finding oneself in the world are presupposed spaces of experiential possibility, which shape the various ways in which things can be experienced.<sup>28</sup>

As this helps spell out, such attunements, which make up the basic bond between self and world, do not primarily consist in the experience of an entity who stands at a particular spatial-temporal location within the world. In keeping with the foregoing analysis, these background feelings occur before any effective separation between self and world. At heart, then, such feelings reveal a more general relation between self and world, where the living agent and the factual situation in which she finds herself are distinct yet unified aspects of one and the same experiential process. An important consequence of this is that these affective dispositions cannot therefore be limited to what is currently felt by the subject at any given moment in time. There is always something more in the subject's basic bond with the world than what the lived body is currently in touch with. Rather than being reducible to particular concretions within time, these background feelings — as necessary and universal structures of the living subject — determine the field of experiential possibility that is presupposed by all of the subject's particular affective states, values, beliefs and actions in the world. As Jan Slaby and Achim Stephan put this, attunements reveal 'a sense of concrete possibility'.<sup>29</sup> They reveal what a situ-

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<sup>28</sup> Matthew Ratcliffe, 'The feeling of being', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 12, no. 8 (2005), 43-60 (pp. 8-10).

<sup>29</sup> Jan Slaby, 'Affective Self-Construal and the Sense of Ability', *Emotion Review* 4, no. 2 (2012), 151-156 (p. 152).

ation offers ‘in terms of potential doings and potential happenings affecting me that I have to put up with or adequately respond to’.<sup>30</sup>

As this suggests, attunements do not only reveal the world, but a veritable sense of self or agency as well. Such attunements provide the individual with a pre-reflective and non-objectifying awareness of what she can and cannot do, and of the fact that it is this embodied, dynamic (i.e. temporal-historical) sense of ‘I can’ and ‘I cannot’ that (pre)structures the way in which she relates to and otherwise apprehends and evaluates herself, others and the world as a whole. It is important to bear in mind, though, that the sense of agency and ability that these attunements bring about cannot be understood apart from the subject’s dialogue or engagement with the world. To the contrary, background feelings must necessarily be understood as a matter of action, as the feel of life’s movement in the world. The living individual’s ever-changing sense of herself and what she can or cannot do is therefore necessarily caught up in and co-determined by her standing in the world, and by certain features of the concrete situation in which she is engaged.

In fact, if we look closer, as Slaby and Stephan have pointed out, we find that this account of implicit background feelings can be further filled out and rendered more concrete by noting that these feelings appear to unfold on various interconnected levels. As Slaby and Stephan note, with each new level, the background feelings take on a ‘growing situational specificity and increasing conceptual impregnation’.<sup>31</sup> The first level would consist in the pure background feelings that we have just described. There are then ‘feelings of *basic familiarity* and *security* on a second level [one might say, a

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Slaby and Stephan, ‘Affective intentionality and self-consciousness’, p. 510.

feeling of trust], thirdly more *specific* existential background feelings, and finally on the fourth level emotional feelings in *mood-like* variations'.<sup>32</sup>

More specifically, at the most basic level, attunements reveal 'one's basic bodily functioning'.<sup>33</sup> On this level, then, attunements provide the individual with a fundamental feeling (or self-consciousness) of life, with the feeling that one is and has a body, that one is healthy and fresh or tired and weak, and that there is a world to which one belongs.<sup>34</sup> As this suggests, while such attunements are intentional in that they remain moments directed across the stream of life to other moments thereof, or else they form a more general relation to the world as a whole, they do not relate to anything specific. In that sense, they are '*quasi* objectless'.<sup>35</sup> This is not to say that attunements do not have phenomenological content.<sup>36</sup> Their content is nothing other than the living individual's general standing in the world, her factual situatedness, the fact that she is here as this specific being, as this temporal-historical position, this original past from which she will have to carry on, whether she wants to or not, and which paves the way for present and future events.

As this indicates, the attunement of life is not monolithic. In its creative and dynamic temporal movement, which consists in various interconnected aspects, the basic feeling of life is always necessarily mutable — with some background feelings lasting longer than others — and polymorphous.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 511.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

Describing the remaining levels, Slaby and Stephan begin by noting that the second level

subsumes more specific relations to the social and physical environment, e.g., the feeling of familiarity or unfamiliarity with a certain setting or social group, and relatedly the feeling of a basic existential ‘security’ or ‘insecurity’ (e.g., feeling safe and in control vs. feeling unspecifically threatened or vulnerable in a given environment). Feelings of general relations toward objects and persons also belong to this second level, i.e., the more specific feeling of familiarity one has towards one’s loved ones [...]. Third level existential feelings are more specific still: Here, we have more conceptually sophisticated feelings like the feeling of ‘belonging to the elite’ and the feeling of being in control or not in control in a *specific* setting (in one’s job, in a relationship, etc.), the feeling of being part of a larger machine or system or the feeling of being excluded from a *certain* group or social practice. On the fourth level we find the most inter-individual variation and the closest connections to the more specifically directed emotions. Examples for fourth-level existential feelings are the situational feelings of *being* flawed and diminished, the situational feelings of being a moral failure, being unloved, hated, or torn (between two or more options).<sup>37</sup>

This clearly indicates the way in which background feelings unfold across various interconnected levels of specificity and conceptual sophistication. As it proceeds through these layers, the drives and feelings of the living individual become increasingly tied to the specific dynamics of her relations and projects, and to the social contexts and capabilities that pertain to her factual situations and engagements in the world.

Given the interconnected nature of these levels, it follows that there would necessarily be a certain interaction between levels.<sup>38</sup> Let us consider the case of a woman who is currently feeling fresh and sprightly while walking along a beach on a warm, sunny day. At the most basic level, what we find here are fundamental bodily feelings, a sense of vitality, energy and perhaps even relaxation. These feelings can translate into a feeling of being capable and comfortable within her current situation. This would amount to a shift from level one to two. This feeling of being capable and comfortable

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 510.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

might then shift into more specific feelings of being enthused, confident and at home in her surroundings, such that the specifics of her current position in this situation — i.e. her sense of herself as a woman in this town, her sense of the beach, and of the other people tanning in the sun and swimming in the water, etc. — would be lived and experienced in various positive ways and thus represent a shift from level two to three.<sup>39</sup>

By the same token, as Slaby and Stephan point out, transformations on higher levels can similarly bring about changes in lower levels. As they note, for example, ‘a concrete feeling of alienation in a specific social situation (level 4) can downgrade one’s feeling of control and strength (level 3), and furthermore lead to more general existential feelings of unfamiliarity and lack of security (level 2)’.<sup>40</sup>

All in all, then, what this reveals is that the gamut of background feelings, from the elemental to the more specific and conceptually complex, are all necessarily intertwined and thus modify and motivate one another. Contrary, therefore, to the dominant view in the history of Western thought, the feelings and conceptual and evaluative capacities of the living subject are not separate or opposed processes. They belong, rather, together in the unitary movement of life. This means that reason and higher-order acts of judgment and belief have their basis in, and are necessarily influenced by, the depths of affectivity.

#### 5.4 AFFECTIVELY DRIVEN CONSCIOUSNESS

On the basis of this non-objectifying affective bond between self and world, the subject is able relate to particular things within the world. In fact, if, as we have seen, these

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<sup>39</sup> For a further example, see *Ibid.*, pp. 510-511.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 511.

background feelings themselves are already intelligent and involve a certain evaluative capacity, then, contrary to Henry's insistence that the ecstatic (intentional) appearing of the world reduces all appearing to object-manifestation, this suggests that not only can the ecstatic appearing of the world accommodate a non-objectifying mode of appearing, but that, within this order of appearing, the non-objectifying drives of life can still guide the low-level perceptual acts of the subject, without the aid of noematic sense. If this is the case, then there can still be two modes of appearing, that of the non-objectifying and objectifying drives of life, but they would no longer unfold in two radically separate domains as in Henry, but as two interrelated modalities within the unified, ecstatic movement of life.

Indeed, in some of his late manuscripts, Husserl himself considers the possibility that there may be non-objectifying drives that unfold before the formation of prominences.<sup>41</sup> Initially, he writes, 'the ego at the primal level is the ego of instinct with undisclosed instinctive goals'.<sup>42</sup> Husserl states that 'original affection is an instinct, thus a sort of empty striving still lacking the "presentation of a goal [i.e. noematic sense]"'.<sup>43</sup> This indicates that while the subject has an original urge or desire toward something, it is not yet conscious of, or does not yet posit, a particular satisfaction for that urge. In everyday life, then, as Bower notes, it would appear that 'experiences and behaviours "unconsciously" appear desirable or undesirable, tending to solicit or inhibit

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<sup>41</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie: Analysen des Unbewusstseins und der Instinkte. Metaphysik. Späte Ethik (Texte aus dem Nachlass 1908-1937)*, ed. by Rochus Sowa and Thomas Vongehr (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014).

<sup>42</sup> Husserl, *Späte Texte über Zeitkonstitution (1929–1934): Die C-Manuskripte*, p. 252.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 326.



responses on our part [...] without our having to take special notice'.<sup>44</sup> For all that, Husserl insists that the the non-objectifying instincts that drive conscious life without positing any noematic sense do not extend very far into the life of the individual.<sup>45</sup>

These late considerations must come as something of a shock, given that, throughout much of his life, Husserl is adamant that noematic sense is essential to perception, and that all concepts must be traced back to such perceptually-founded acts. Indeed, despite these later considerations, Husserl's account of the ability of the non-objectifying drives to guide low-level perceptual activity remains tentative and fragmentary at best, and his official position ultimately appears to remain that noematic sense is indeed essential to perception, and that it is generally responsible for driving our perceptual activity.

However, it is anything but clear that this is the case, or that the ability of these non-objectifying drives to orient the subject's low-level perceptual activity is as short-lived as Husserl suggests. On the basis of the way in which they find themselves attuned to the world, the particular non-objectifying instincts, in their aesthetic-ethical nature, are predisposed to respond to the field of sensory data in particular ways, and thereby aid in determining whether the subject attentively turns toward this or that content, or takes up this or that course of action. Though the aesthetical-ethical laws of sensibility may not be as hard and fast as Henry supposes, it stands to reason that certain innate biases would be to some extent ingrained into the subject for evolutionary

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<sup>44</sup> Bower, 'Husserl's Theory of Instincts as a Theory of Affection', p. 138. Such instinctive intentional states remain unconscious in the sense that they have not yet risen to the level of act-intentionality and object-manifestation. They function as a pre-reflective and non-objectifying directedness that does not yet involve the ego's taking an active stance on things, and which, accordingly, are not yet directed towards objects as such, but towards what Husserl refers to as pre-constituted object-like formations. As Husserl himself writes, 'I do not need to say that the entirety of these observations that we are undertaking can also be given the famed title of the "unconscious"'. Thus our considerations concern a phenomenology of the so-called unconscious'. Husserl, *Analysis of Passive and Active Synthesis*, p. 201.

<sup>45</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Die Lebenswelt: Auslegungen der vorgegebenen Welt und ihrer Konstitution*, ed. by Rochus Sowa (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), pp. 317-318.

purposes. For example, the subject is predisposed to find shapes that evoke safety, such as circles and curved lines, as appealing, while those that suggest threat or injury, such as triangles and sharp angles, are seen as unappealing. As the experience of the subject develops, her pre-reflective and non-objectifying awareness of the affective movements of her life, and the passive associations that are formed therein, will aid in the formation of passive preferences for certain contents and actions that enable the subject to find pleasure and avoid displeasure, in light of which the subject's perceptual landscape begins to take on a more determinate form.

In this case, when certain elements in the flow of sensory data sufficiently appeal to the subject and arouse her to action, the non-objectifying drives will continue to monitor how her actions are faring by providing her with positive or negative reinforcement in the form of varying degrees of pleasure or displeasure. In light of this feedback, the subject will alter her bodily movements accordingly, say, when her actions are going well, by continuing to explore this sensory data and those things which bear some resemblance or contiguity with it, and all of this without the subject's being objectively aware of the conditions for the fulfilment of her desire (i.e. without noematic sense). Instead, in such low-level perceptual acts, the subject is simply guided by what we have called the primal sense of life, by a set of desires and goals still lacking in noematic sense. In these perceptual acts, the subject is, in a manner of speaking, led blindly through the world by the irresistible vivacity of life, by its need for self-growth and for those actions and contents that may satisfy its needs.

As these non-objectifying drives find fulfilment, they can then develop into and provide the materials for higher-level drives, for objectifying drives that seeks to synthesise and make objective sense of the given data and to present the object as such. In this way, rather than being separate, the non-objectifying drives found and make possi-

ble the objectifying drives and the higher-order synthetic activities that constitute the objective world.

Even as the non-objectifying drives find fulfilment and increasingly give onto higher-order objectifying acts of consciousness, however, this does not mean that the former cease to drive the subject's more low-level perceptual acts, without the aid of noematic sense. To the contrary, our everyday experience indicates that, throughout its lifetime, the living subject is still routinely pulled toward certain sensory contents, and displays a preference for certain actions, without her necessarily taking any notice, or being able to fully explain or account for these preferences.

## 5.5 THE DRIVE FOR DESTRUCTION

That being said, as we began to see in the previous chapter, the subject is not only driven by her drive for self-growth. Though this point has not been well documented within the history of phenomenology,<sup>46</sup> insofar as life's need for self-growth functions as its original and all-founding drive, when this need remains largely unsatisfied, it follows that it invariably turns against itself and gives rise to a drive to destroy itself and life in general.

In this case, contrary to Freud's insistence that patterns of destruction issue from a retreat from sexuality, our view suggests that the destructive impulse (or death drive)

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<sup>46</sup> Husserl himself does not treat the issue of a drive for destruction at all. Additionally, Merleau-Ponty, who otherwise provides a detailed analysis of the lived body, does not seem to have much of an ear for this aspect of life. As Leonard Lawlor writes, 'it seems we have to confirm what many commentators have said over the last couple of decades: Merleau-Ponty's thought is based on a kind of tranquility. What has become of the barbaric principle, the wildness or savageness, the evil of nature? It has become tranquil, "the true tranquility", as Merleau-Ponty says in the first nature course'. Leonard Lawlor, *The Implications of Immanence: Towards a New Concept of Life* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), p. 120.

must arise from a retreat from the creativity of life.<sup>47</sup> When the living subject, in its drive for self-growth, fails to engage in actions that rise to the height of its energy, as invariably occurs from very early on in life, a certain malaise and unhappiness arises within the flesh, ushering in an impulsion toward aggressive or otherwise destructive forms of behaviour.<sup>48</sup> The death drive is present at every moment life is not lived fully; and since the subject cannot always engage in actions that rise to the heights of her energy, the death drive is always present in life in varying degrees and manners.

As this suggests, the life and death drives cannot be conceived as separate. As Freud himself recognised, they ‘are always alloyed with each other in varying and very different proportions and so become unrecognisable to our judgment’.<sup>49</sup> In our own case, it is necessarily life’s drive for self-growth that founds and sustains the drive for self-destruction. Consequently, as we indicated in the previous chapter, the death-drive can never wholly overtake or nullify the life-drive. The death drive remains a form of curiosity and self-growth. It can thus itself serve as a form of pleasure, but as a pleasure in unpleasure, as occurs in masochism, for example. Therefore, the death drive does not overturn the pleasure principle, that is, life in its need for self-growth. Strictly speaking, as Nicolas Smith notes, there is no beyond the pleasure principle.<sup>50</sup>

Given that the drive for self-growth is all-founding, and thus spawns a basic interconnection amongst all the drives, it follows that there can be a certain exchange

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<sup>47</sup> The Austrian psychoanalyst Otto Rank similarly contends that self-destructive forms of behaviour are a result of a failure in creativity. Our view of this matter — and, indeed, that of Henry — while distinct from that of Rank, undoubtedly bears some similarities to it. Henry himself does not appear to have been familiar with Rank. At the very least, Rank receives no mention in his *Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, or in any of his other works. For more on Rank’s position, see *Art and Artist: Creative Urge and Personality Development*, trans. by Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Agathon Press, 1975).

<sup>48</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 103.

<sup>49</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 97.

<sup>50</sup> Nicolas Smith, *Towards a Phenomenology of Repression — A Husserlian Reply to the Freudian Challenge* (Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 2010), p. 293.

amongst the drives. As a result, when, in one way or another, the creative impulse of life feels frustrated, the numbness or hostility that comes into it can be transferred onto or otherwise find expression within any of the other drives, such as the drive for sex, self-defence, etc.<sup>51</sup> On account of a mounting malaise with life in general, for instance, an individual may yell or act aggressively toward her spouse, or she may try to further numb the creative tendency of her life by sitting in front of the television, or by clinging to her sadness and refusing to deal with her depression.

By the same token, certain drives can compensate for others. As Smith notes, it may prove to be the case that ‘drinking [can] compensate for [...] an obstructed sexual desire’. Of course, ‘such an exchange of hostages will never be completely successful, for ultimately all transferences of drive fulfilment will leave intact a core of desire that knows no articulation and which therefore will always elude mediate or immediate satisfaction: “It is no accident that human beings never obtain peace of mind”’.<sup>52</sup>

As Freud well knew, owing to the painful or distressing nature of these frustrated experiences, certain contents, and indeed, even certain drive-complexes and background feelings, can be repressed, which means, contrary to Henry’s understanding of the matter, they can be thrust away from consciousness.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the account of the living present we have laid out, in which the primal flow functions as an endless process

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<sup>51</sup> In fact, it must be said that this works both ways: just as a basic, underlying dissatisfaction with life can transfer onto and effect other drives, so too any frustration undergone with these other drives can feed back onto and take a toll on life’s instinctive curiosity and drive for self-growth. What we have here is thus an intricate web of drives that mutually motivate and modify one another.

<sup>52</sup> Smith, *Towards a Phenomenology of Repression*, p. 170.

<sup>53</sup> As Freud writes, ‘[w]e have learnt from psycho-analysis that the essence of the process of repression lies, not in putting an end to, in annihilating, the idea which represents an instinct, but in preventing it from becoming conscious’. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, ed. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), p. 166.

of self-othering, can be seen as the necessary condition that makes repression possible.<sup>54</sup> As we have seen, in its constant self-differentiation, the primal flow functions as an endless gliding away, where each present moment is equally immediately retained and continuously slides ever-deeper into the past. As this process unfolds, certain drives, and the contents toward which they are directed (i.e. drive-complexes), can form certain passive associations with still other drive-complexes, and thereby continue to hold varying degrees of influence over the subject's conduct in the world. At the same time, though, because life functions in this way, the drives necessarily compete, inhibit and otherwise cover over one another, as occurs, for instance, when a desire for sleep is subdued and overcome by a desire to persevere and push through the work one needs to finish, or else they can be altogether repressed in order to prevent their distressing pathos from threatening the integrity of conscious life.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, insofar as these processes appear to be built into the essential structure of life, and seem to be necessary for things to be constituted as they are, we can join Nicolas Smith in asserting that these processes of inhibition and repression are 'necessary [and universal] structural aspect[s]' of life.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Of course, the concepts of repression and the unconscious do not have their origin in any one individual. As Rosemarie Spenner Sand notes, they appear, if only in embryonic form, throughout the history of Western thought, and appear to stretch back to its very beginnings. See *The Unconscious without Freud* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), p. 18. Lancelot Law Whyte also develops this point in *The Unconscious before Freud* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1962). To give but one example, Blaise Pascal touches upon the concept of repression in his famous assertion that 'the heart has its reasons which reason does not know'. Blaise Pascal *Pensées*, trans. by A. J. Krailsheimer (Penguin Books, 1966), p. 277.

<sup>55</sup> Analysing the process of repression at work within perception, Husserl notes that even though the previous intentional structure is voided, it is not erased from consciousness, but remains there as crossed out. In his words: 'we are still conscious of the previous sense, but as "painted over", and where the corresponding moments are concerned, crossed out. Accordingly, here we are studying what the phenomenon of "otherwise", of "annulment", of nullity, or of negation looks like. We recognise as basic and essential that the superimposition of a new sense over a sense that is already constituted takes place through repression, just like correlatively in the noetic direction, there is a formation of a second apprehension, a second apperception that is not juxtaposed to a first one, but lies over it and contends with it'. Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Syntheses*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>56</sup> Smith, *Towards a Phenomenology of Repression*, p. 280.

As Smith points out, ‘Husserl suggests that when something is repressed due to a conflict (as between two intuitions that do not cohere), it becomes suppressed beyond intuition but does not thereby lose its vivacity, for the conflict *itself* increases vivacity’.<sup>57</sup> Husserl himself appears to acknowledge that while this repressed level of retention is withdrawn from consciousness, and thus tends to go ‘unnoticed’, it does not lose its force entirely, but continues to actively engage with passive associations.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, one can find evidence for this in some of Freud’s case studies. As he notes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*:

[e]veryone knows people whose human relationships all end up the same way. This includes benefactors who are eventually deserted in resentment by every one of their protégés [...] and who thus seem fated to taste to the dregs all the bitterness of ingratitude. This includes men whose friendships all end in the same way: betrayal. This includes others who during their life, time and time again, repeatedly raise another person into a position of great authority in the private or public sphere, only to overthrow this authority figure after a certain time and replace him with someone else. This includes lovers whose love affairs with women all go through the same phases and come to the same end.<sup>59</sup>

Everyday life is full of such cases in which human beings find themselves acting in ways that are destructive to them or to the species at large, without their taking any real notice of it. Indeed, even in cases when an individual does know that her conduct is destructive and expresses a desire to change it, it is often the case that, nevertheless, for reasons that remain mysterious even, or perhaps especially, to her, she cannot help but continue in such courses of action. This serves as evidence that life possesses the ability to bring into being affective states and actions that lie beyond the purview and power

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. In Husserl’s words, ‘[i]n this case, a special repression takes place, a repression of elements, which were previously in conflict, into the “unconscious”, but not into the integrally cohesive sphere of the distant past; by contrast, in the living conflict, repression takes place as a suppression, as a suppression into non-intuitiveness, but not into non-vivacity — on the contrary, the vivacity gets augmented in the conflict, as analogous to other contrasts’. Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Syntheses*, pp. 514-515.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, ed. by Todd Dufresne (Toronto: Broadview Editions, 2011), pp. 63-64.

of consciousness. As such, the affective force of the non-objectifying drives for destruction appear to continue to play an integral role in orienting and otherwise steering the subject in her everyday involvements with the world throughout her lifetime.<sup>60</sup>

## 5.6 TOWARDS THE FULL PRESENCE OF THINGS

Nonetheless, it could be asked whether the sensibility of life should really be seen as powerful enough to make contact with the world and the full presence of things. Is it not the case, as Husserl's work suggests, that it is apperceptive acts of objectification that are solely responsible for enabling the subject to see a table in its entirety as a chair (as a three-dimensional object), and not just the partial profiles (the chair as a two-dimensional object-like formation) that are given to her at the moment?<sup>61</sup> As Husserl might remind us, while affectivity can put the subject in touch with the so-called pre-world, with its pre-constituted, two-dimensional object-like formations, it is simply too indeterminate to provide the subject with access to the full presence of things in the three-dimensional world. For this to be achieved, the two-dimensional sensory flux must be apprehended or 'interpreted in light of perceptual expectations involving possi-

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<sup>60</sup> Freud deals with this in his account of the return of the repressed. In his view, when the repressed no longer succeeds in keeping the distressing away from consciousness, it irrupts and comes back as a symptom (or else as a fantasy, slip of the tongue, etc.), but what comes back — in this case, the symptom — tends not to be the same as that which was originally repressed. More often than not, since having been repressed, the repressed feeling or idea has undergone significant distortion, to the extent that the subject in question finds it difficult to see any link between her suffering and the symptom, and thus tends to see the symptom as the invasion of an alien intruder in her life. See his *Moses and Monotheism: Three Essays*, trans. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1974).

<sup>61</sup> In other words, this noematic sense forms a schematic that contextualises sensory information and enables the subject to apperceive the object as such through this noematic sense.



ble series of visual sensations that work together to present things' three-dimensional spatial structure'.<sup>62</sup>

It is highly questionable, nonetheless, whether Husserl is justified in supposing that (visual) sensation is two-dimensional. As Bower rightly notes, while it may be the case that a momentary instance of sensory data is spatially vague or indeterminate, this does not necessarily mean it forfeits a spatial dimension.<sup>63</sup> If this is the case, then the non-objectifying sensibility of life can put the subject in touch with the world, even though it does not represent it as such. Yet if, for the sake of argument, we accept Husserl's framing, the non-objectifying affects would still appear equipped to make the three-dimensional structure of things detectable by the perceiver. While it is true that the sensory information with which the subject is presented at any given moment in time may not present the subject with the three-dimensional object, by virtue of its non-objectifying drives, the subject can over time explore the thing in question and form what Bower refers to as affect schemas that

enable a snapshot-like snippet of sensation to link up in certain ways with antecedent and successive sensation to bring forth the structure of the momentary sensation. In other words, synchronically, visual sensation does not reveal (e.g.) three-dimensional structure, but it may do so diachronically. The apparent poverty of sensation (i.e. without apprehension) is due only to the artificial focus on it as an ever-vanishing instantaneous snippet of experience.<sup>64</sup>

As the non-objectifying drives motivate the subject to continue to explore the sensory data, and to alter her bodily movements according to how well or poorly they are faring, the initially indeterminate sensory data will be clarified and contextualised to provide

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<sup>62</sup> Bower, 'Husserl on Perception', p. 19. As this indicates, what is at stake in providing the subject with the full presence of 'the perceived world is its specifically *spatial* phenomenal character'. Bower, 'Affectively Driven Perception', p. 238.

<sup>63</sup> Bower, 'Husserl on Perception', p. 21, note 12.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 20. Nico Frijda and Gerrod Parrott also make this point. See Nico H. Frijda and Gerrod W. Parrott, 'Basic emotions or Ur-emotions?' *Emotion Review* 3, no. 4 (2011), 406–415.

the subject with a pre-objective and non-objectifying awareness of the full presence of things.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, even though the non-objectifying feelings do not represent the world as such, there remains a very real sense in which they do enable the subject to make contact with a full-fledged world, with the pre-objective world.

Indeed, as the subject is led along by these non-objectifying drives, she will only further develop a primal sense of how to conduct herself in exploring the world, of how to best move her limbs, crane her neck, or tense or relax her eyes in order to better access and explore her surroundings. So far as this is the case, it stands to reason that the subject's ability to clarify the initially indeterminate sensory data will similarly improve. Thus, we are able to overcome, or at least diminish, the strict contrast that Husserl posits between the lucidity of the mind and the opaqueness of the body.

This is not to deny that apperceptive acts of objectification play an important role in the life of the subject. While affect is able to steer low-level perceptual acts and to, in some sense, provide the subject with the full presence of things, it is not all-powerful, as Henry is wont to suppose. It does not exclusively guide higher-order acts and it is unable to represent determinate properties in things. For this, perceptual sense (i.e. horizon-laden experience) is required. To be sure, as we have now seen, in making possible the normativity of experience and enabling the subject to access the full presence of things, non-objectifying feelings found and sustain the objectifying acts and the objective world to which they relate. But this does not take anything away from the fact that apperceptive acts of objectification provide the subject with a schematic orientation or set of expectations that help guide higher-order perceptual acts through the world,

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<sup>65</sup> As Bower notes, '[t]hese affective and motor accompaniments of sensation can be thought of as doing the disambiguating work on sensation that relieves it of the indeterminacy Husserl felt held it back from counting itself as inherently intentional and object-directed'. Bower, 'Husserl on Perception', p. 20.

and which enable the subject to represent and see things as they are in themselves (i.e. in their objectivity).

Indeed, it appears to be the case that objectifying acts of apprehension can themselves give rise to certain non-objectifying affective tonalities. Based on the foregoing study, when the subject observes a painting, her theoretical observations regarding the artwork must ultimately be founded upon certain non-objectifying affects and background feelings. In terms of the transcendental genesis of such objectifying acts, non-objectifying feelings must enjoy an absolute priority; they must serve as the building blocks upon which the former are necessarily based. Yet this does not mean that the latter unidirectionally found the former, as Henry contends. As the individual observes the painting in front of her, her theoretical reflections can themselves enter into and inspire certain non-objectifying feelings within the subject. This means that objectifying acts and complex conceptual and linguistic contents are in fact required in order for the subject to be able to experience some of the feelings that it undoubtedly does. For example, when the subject gazes upon the painting of a setting sun, apart from the affective tonalities elicited by the arrangement of its sensible elements — its curves, colours and so forth — the concept of a setting sun will itself be undergone as a non-objectifying feeling.<sup>66</sup> The experience of a setting sun involves a non-objectifying feeling that requires a certain level of conceptual and linguistic sophistication in order to be explained.<sup>67</sup> To give a further example, as Slaby and Stephan point out, a subject can similarly experience ‘the feeling of being a true American, which might include a complicated conception of what being a true American amounts to. The feeling of being a

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<sup>66</sup> In a manner of speaking, the living subject bathes in a world of sensible elements and higher-order conceptual contents.

<sup>67</sup> For more on this see Slaby and Stephan, ‘Affective intentionality and self-consciousness’, p. 513.

“moral failure” might require an understanding of what being a moral agent in a given community amounts to’.<sup>68</sup> In all of these cases, we find affective states that require ‘very complicated, high-level contents — contents that only beings with sophisticated conceptual [and linguistic] capacities are capable of instantiating’.<sup>69</sup> Objectifying acts are therefore necessary and universal conditions for certain non-objectifying feelings. Contrary to Henry’s assertions on the matter, therefore, it must be acknowledged that the relation between non-objectifying and objectifying acts is not unidirectional, where the former always gives rise to the latter, but bidirectional, where the two mutually motivate and modify one another. Because of this, it can be said that both the objectifying and non-objectifying drives are essential in putting the subject in contact with the world in the fullness of its presence.

#### 5.7 TRUST, WORLD AND OTHERS

While this sharpens our understanding of some of the necessary and universal structures that enable the subject to experience material things as existing in themselves, there is another, narrower sense of objectivity that we have yet to address, and which our study of the transcendental life of the subject as the ultimate foundation of the world needs to account for. This sense of objectivity, as we indicated in our earlier study of Husserl, is the more commonplace understanding of the term, where objectivity signifies valid for everyone. In this case, something is objective when everyone comes to the same conclusion regarding it. But how is it that things can appear to different people in the same way despite the fact that people stand in different experiential situations? How can there

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

be a world that is there for everyone?<sup>70</sup> Put differently, how is it that each living subject not only has an experiential world that is its own, but that together they also have one that is experienced as common to all of them?

Obviously, the constitution of this other type of objectivity depends upon intersubjectivity, which is to say, upon a certain interrelation amongst human subjects. In this sense, intersubjectivity must be a constitutive (i.e. transcendental) structure of subjectivity. An account of this common, shared world hinges upon an account of the way in which the subject's experience of a foreign subjectivity enables it to experience (i.e. constitute) a common world.

We know that it is the ecstatic self-alteration of the primal flow, as the most basic level of subjectivity, which serves as the necessary and universal form of all human subjects. While this primal flow does not itself appear to depend upon others, as it appears to enjoy at least a certain ontological autonomy, it is that which makes it possible for the living subject to relate to the world and others.<sup>71</sup> As we have observed, contrary to Husserl's early assertions on the matter, this primal flow cannot be contained within the immanence of consciousness. There is, rather, always a stream of life as a primordial transcendence that exceeds this enclosure, and which is always already open to the world and the absolute otherness of others.

The foregoing analysis has gone some way towards illustrating how this process unfolds. It is the continuum of dynamic background feelings and non-objectifying drives that stand as the living subject's first contact with the world. Affectivity simply is

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<sup>70</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 91.

<sup>71</sup> Indeed, if the primal flow did not enjoy at least a certain ontological autonomy, it would not be possible for there to be a genuine intersubjectivity; there would be no real difference between subjects, and so there could be no real interrelation between them.

the subject's general standing in the world (i.e. her factual situatedness); it is the weight of her ever-developing history, as well as her first communication with others.

In this case, affectivity would be the very heart of our experience of a foreign subjectivity. Henry himself suggests that the mother-child bond is an exemplary case of our essentially affective, a priori interrelation with others.<sup>72</sup> The mother-child relation is exemplary for Henry inasmuch as it appears to function as an interrelation that is not founded upon 'a noematic or noetic mode of presentation'; it is an access to the other that does not require conscious reflection, language, or any other cognitive act of objectification. Instead, the mother and her infant communicate on a wholly affective, non-objectifying level.<sup>73</sup>

According to Henry, it is, among other things, precisely this affective basis of the subject's relation with the other that Husserl fails to fully capture or appreciate. In his eyes, even though Husserl affords an important role to empathy in the fifth *Cartesian Meditation*, he still regards it as a gear in the more complex mental machinery of objectifying cognition.<sup>74</sup> In line with his approach to appearing in general, Husserl favours apperceptive acts of objectification over affectivity in the constitution of intersubjectivity, and so he reduces the appearing of others to object-manifestation. In light of this, whether rightly or wrongly, Henry argues that Husserl does not sufficiently distinguish between how the subject experiences an object and how she experiences another human individual.

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<sup>72</sup> Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, p. 115. Other exemplary cases of intersubjectivity that he mentions include 'the hypnotist with the hypnotized, the lover with the beloved, [and] the analyst with the patient'. Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. Of course, in Henry's case, this occurs outside the ecstatic world and its referential relations of meaning.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

While the life of the subject cannot function in the radically immanent manner Henry suggests, he is not wrong that the mother-child relation serves as an exemplary case of the affective basis of this bond. On our view, given that the transcendental life of each living subject enjoys a certain ontological autonomy, and functions as a primordial transcendence, it follows that the fetus is in the mother as a one in the other, as a transcendence in immanence. While the mother and her fetus cannot therefore be immanently fused with one another as Henry suggests, the fact that they share a common temporal and bodily basis in the anonymous and pre-individual self-alteration of the living present means that, as Husserl knew, they enjoy ‘mutually corresponding and harmonious constitutive systems’.<sup>75</sup> This makes possible ‘a harmony in the genesis [of sense] that is occurring in the individuals’.<sup>76</sup> At heart, this unfolds on an affective level. Because mother and fetus possess these harmonious constitutive systems — i.e. because they are, in a manner of speaking, moments of the same syntax — they are both capable of affecting one another in their bodily actions in ways that are thoroughly intelligible to one another, that is, as either complementing or frustrating one another’s needs and drives in various degrees and manners.

Sticking with the exemplary case of mother and fetus, it must be said that, in particular, the fetus is wholly vulnerable to and dependent upon the mother for its nourishment and subsistence. As the felt bodily actions (or body schema) of the mother respond to and anticipate those of the fetus (and vice versa), a passive and associative bonding occurs that provides each with an affective, non-objectifying awareness of itself in relation to the other — i.e. as distinct yet coordinated, living, experiencing beings who feel and behave in similar ways — which does not depend upon any media-

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<sup>75</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 108.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

tion of the understanding.<sup>77</sup> More specifically, the fetus develops a sense that its ‘neuro-muscular activity comes already blended with the co-affective feeling of the presence of the other [...] and the [affectively] anticipated arc of the other’s intentional action’.<sup>78</sup> Susan Stuart describes this as ‘enkinaesthetic dialogue [i.e. interactivity]’, as a ‘community’ and ‘reciprocity of affective co-engagement’, as ‘the experiential entanglement of our sensory-kinaesthetic action-enquiry, that is, the reciprocally affective neuro-muscular dynamical flows and muscle tensions that are felt and enfolded between co-participating agents and objects’.<sup>79</sup>

In the case of the fetus, for example, as the bodily movements of the mother sympathetically respond to its rhythmic movements and needs, and thereby achieves a certain affective harmonisation with the latter, it can be said that the fetus develops a primal, non-objectifying awareness of itself as being in some sense intertwined with and known by the mother, by the mother who is, at this point, its world.<sup>80</sup> To the extent this affective interaction is successful, it endows the fetus with a primal sense of trust in the mother (i.e. world).<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> This can be evidenced in the affective, bodily synchronisation that is achieved between the two. See Janet A. Dipietro, Rafael A. Irizarry, Kathleen A. Costigan and Edith D. Gurewitsch, ‘The psychophysiology of the maternal-fetal relationship’, *Psychophysiology* 41, no. 4 (2004), 510-520 (p. 519).

<sup>78</sup> Susan A. J. Stuart, ‘Enkinaesthesia: Proto-moral value in action-enquiry and interaction’, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 17, no. 2 (2018), 411-431 (p. 422). In other words, as this affective interactivity unfolds, the fetus gradually develops a primal sense of itself as implicated in a common texture or world of life. *Ibid.*, p. 420.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 413, 419. As Stuart goes on, ‘[w]e might describe this by saying that our lived experience is always tempered by the direct spontaneous reception, or passive synthesis, of the experientially entangled living being of the other as they transgress our own experience and we theirs, but the point to note is this: this intentional transgression is immediate, non-inferential co-being, characterised by a pre-noetic immanent [i.e. direct] enkinesthetic intercorporeality’. Susan A. J. Stuart, ‘Feeling Our Way: Enkinesthetic Enquiry and Immanent Intercorporeality’, in *Intercorporeality: Emerging Socialities in Interaction*, ed. by Christian Meyer, Jürgen Streeck and J. Scott Jordan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 51-72 (pp. 63-64).

<sup>80</sup> Alejandra Martinez Quintero and Hanne de Jaegher have similarly found that there is a certain minimal intersubjectivity already at play between mother and fetus. See ‘Pregnant Agencies: Movement and Participation in Maternal-Fetal Interactions’, *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2020), 1-16 (p. 14).

<sup>81</sup> I develop the issue of trust in Henry’s thought in my article ‘Bonds of Trust: Thinking the Limits of Reciprocity with Heidegger and Michel Henry’, *Studia Phaenomenologica* 19 (2019), 289-309.



Here we have the so-called fate of the subject: the primal knowledge of the other that helps create the individual's affective disposition (i.e. background feelings, such as trust, understood as the feeling of safety and confidence in one's openness and vulnerability to another), and which will serve as the basis for all of its future relations, and which will thereby echo through its remaining days. As Henry writes, 'I hear forever the sound of my birth'.<sup>82</sup>

As a matter of course, this enkinaesthetic consonance with and primal feeling of trust in others and the world continues to develop and attain new layers as the life of the individual progresses. As the practical bodily enkinaesthetic actions of the infant's parents and caregivers continue to intertwine with her own and meet her needs, this reinforces the infant's feeling of familiarity with and trust in foreign world-directed subjects, as well as the world in which she finds herself, and it deepens her expectation that both will continue to satisfy her needs in the future.<sup>83</sup>

Altogether, this strengthens the infant's feeling that other sensing and experiencing subjects, as unique centres of reference for the world, genuinely recognise rather than merely imitate her, and that the things she experiences according to her needs and aesthetic-ethical sensibility — her tendency to find this agreeable, that disagreeable — are also experienced in much the same way by others.<sup>84</sup> Because of this, the subject experiences the world on an affective level as mediated by its experience of its givenness for others. This further solidifies the individual's primal sense that its own experiential world is intertwined with that of others, where each one manifests the other, thereby

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<sup>82</sup> Henry, *I Am the Truth*, p. 262.

<sup>83</sup> Stuart, 'Enkinaesthesia: Proto-moral value in action-enquiry and interaction', pp. 415-416.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

forming a non-objective world that transcends one's own finite existence and that is there for everyone.

In keeping with the nature of background feelings, this feeling of trust pre-structures the ways in which the subject can relate to, evaluate and, ultimately, apprehend herself, others and the world as a whole. Owing to this attunement, for example, the subject is able to feel secure and at ease in her being in the world, in certain situations, and in her relations with certain individuals. As a result, she is able and willing to assent to, emulate and internalise the enkinaesthetic melodies (i.e. sensori-kinaesthetic actions), affective values and instructions of others, and to thereby let herself become gradually exposed to the full presence of things and the world as a whole, to the non-objective, common world that can never be entirely thematised in reflection. In this way, affectivity serves as a necessary and universal structure in the subject's interrelation with others and in their constitution of a shared, intersubjective world.

Yet if this is the case, then there needs to be an alteration of the natural attitude as understood by Husserl. The belief around which Husserl's account of the matter is centred has now come forward as being premised upon this pre-reflective and non-objectifying feeling and praxis of trust. The belief in the world that characterises the natural attitude has its basis in this deep and fundamental sense of trust. Where the subject's belief in the world is an epistemological relation and a matter of cognition, trust is an aesthetic-ethical relation and is at heart a matter of affectivity. There is here an intertwining of epistemology, aesthetics and ethics, such that the former can never entirely break free of the latter.

## 5.8 LAYERS OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY

While the enkinaesthetic intertwining and non-objectifying feeling of trust serves as the foundation of the subject's relations with others, and continues to help shape the ways in which she can relate to others, needless to say, this does not stand as the only level along which the subject's sense of interconnection with others unfolds. In keeping with the foregoing analysis, there are various layers to human intersubjectivity. Our interrelation with others as co-constitutors of the world (i.e. as foreign world-directed agents) is not only experienced, in however primitive a manner, on the level of affection, but on the level of apperceptive acts of apprehension as well.

To see how this is so, let us return to Husserl's theory of perception. As we have seen, Husserl finds that the perceptual experience of objects to some extent hinges upon the appresentation of absent yet co-given properties or adumbrations of the object. The object possesses an array of simultaneous adumbrations. In the analysis of this horizon of co-existing adumbrations, Husserl comes to realise that these adumbrations 'cannot be actualized by a single subject, since it at any given time is restricted to a single perspective'.<sup>85</sup> However, since, as Zahavi notes,

the ontological structure of the object implies a simultaneous plurality of adumbrations, Husserl is forced to refer to a plurality of possible subjects, who are to be understood as the noetic correlate of the object's noematic plurality of co-existing aspects. Provided that the subject as subject is directed towards objects, provided that every experience of objects is characterised by the horizontal appearance of the object, where a certain aspect is present and the others are absent, and provided that this horizontal intentionality, this interplay between presence and absence can only be accounted for phenomenologically through a reference to a plurality of possible subjects, the consequence is, that I in my being as subject is referred to Others.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Dan Zahavi, 'Husserl's Intersubjective Transformation of Transcendental Philosophy', *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 27, no 3 (1996), 228-245 (p. 231).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

In this way, the horizontal character of perception contributes to the subject's a priori reference to others. Indeed, according to Husserl, this sense of interrelation with others as co-subjects is present for the subject irrespective of whether others are concretely present for her or not.<sup>87</sup> Because perceptual consciousness involves this a priori reference to others, everything that is presented to the subject is given with 'an apperceptive horizon of possible experience, own and foreign'.<sup>88</sup> This means that the subject's experience of things is mediated by her experience of their givenness to others, and this enables her to experience her world as being intertwined with a common objective world.

This sense of intersubjectivity as co-subjectivity can then be executed and further developed through empathic understanding.<sup>89</sup> First, though, it bears noting that, as Stuart rightly points out, enkinaesthesia (and, in our case, trust), while the foundation of empathy, should not be confused with the latter.<sup>90</sup> On Husserl's account, the subject's empathic experience of the other is seemingly perceptual in nature, in that it grasps the other herself.<sup>91</sup> That is to say, when I perceive an individual articulate one of her inner experiences, I also perceive these experiences themselves — I see her joy, pain, etc. — though, Husserl adds, I can only have an outer and not an inner perception of them.

That being said, Husserl's position on this matter is not without a certain tension or indecision. For he also states that while the body of the other is intuitively given, the

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<sup>87</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität: Zweiter Teil: 1921-1928*, ed. by Iso Kern (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p. 289.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. See also Zahavi, 'Husserl's Intersubjective Transformation of Transcendental Philosophy', p. 231.

<sup>89</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 92. As Zahavi notes, in the late C-manuscripts (C 17) Husserl writes "[w]hen empathy occurs, is the community, the intersubjectivity there already in advance, and is empathy merely a disclosing performance?" This is a question which he answers positively shortly after'. Zahavi, 'Husserl's Intersubjective Transformation of Transcendental Philosophy', p. 231.

<sup>90</sup> Stuart, 'Enkinaesthesia: Proto-moral value in action-enquiry and interaction', pp. 413, 424.

<sup>91</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität: Erster Teil: 1905-1920*, ed. by Iso Kern (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p. 24.

same cannot be said of the other's inner experiences. My own inner experiences are given to me originally (i.e. directly), but those of the other cannot be given in the same way. Instead, Husserl finds that the other's inner experiences are appresented to me through a unique form of apperception, which enables those experiences to appear to me as co-present.<sup>92</sup> In this case, when I see and hear the other speaking, what I directly see is her body and its expressions, and, on the basis of this perception, I empathically co-perceive her joy, sadness, etc. Therefore, while it can be said that we see the human person taken as a whole, the same cannot be said of her inner psychical experiences considered in themselves, which can only be empathically represented.

Be that as it may, Husserl will at times continue to speak of empathy as providing the subject with an original experience of the consciousness of the other. Indeed, he stresses that the other that is given to me in empathy is not a mere analogue of the other, but the other herself.<sup>93</sup> How, if at all, do we square these accounts? Zahavi offers a helpful suggestion in this regard, one that is supported by some of Husserl's own texts. While Husserl ultimately finds that empathy does not provide me with first-person access to the inner experiences of the other, Zahavi notes that he does correctly observe

that empathy [nevertheless] involves a perception of the other, i.e., that it amounts to a form of person perception, and that it furthermore would be a mistake to measure empathy against the standards of either self-perception or external object perception. Empathy has its own kind of originality, its own kind of fulfilment and corroboration and its own criteria of success and failure.<sup>94</sup>

Husserl's reluctance in places to affirm that the subject enjoys a direct empathic understanding of the other clearly issues from a concern that this would be tantamount to

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<sup>92</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, pp. 123-124, 149.

<sup>93</sup> Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität: Zweiter Teil: 1921-1928*, p. 385.

<sup>94</sup> Dan Zahavi, 'Empathy and mirroring: Husserl and Gallese', in *Life, Subjectivity & Art: Essays in Honor of Rudolf Bernet*, ed. by Roland Breeur and Ullrich Melle (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), pp. 217-254 (p. 230). Though the two positions remain distinct in important ways, as Zahavi discusses in this essay, Husserl's account of empathy and pairing finds support in the neurological discovery of mirror neurons and the mirror neuron hypothesis as propounded in the work of Vittorio Gallese.

claiming that the subject enjoys the same kind of first-person access to the consciousness of the other as it does its own. Yet this concern appears to be less than necessary.

As Zahavi duly points out, such a concern

assumes that there is a single golden standard of what directness amounts to, and that a direct access to one's own mental life constitutes the standard against which everything else has to be measured. In other contexts, however, Husserl has been careful to point out that it is unacceptable to transfer the demands we put on evidence in one domain to other domains where these demands are in principle incapable of being realised. Employing that insight, one could respect the difference between first-person and third-person access to psychological states without making the mistake of restricting and equating experiential access with first-person access. To put it differently, why not argue that it is possible to experience minds in more than one way?<sup>95</sup>

If we acknowledge that the demands placed on evidence in one domain do not necessarily apply to all others, then it must be said that the fact that the subject does not enjoy the same first-person access to the other's inner experiences as it does its own does not constitute a failure or shortcoming, nor does it necessarily mean that the subject does not enjoy a direct experiential understanding of the other.<sup>96</sup>

In fact, if the inner experiences of the other were accessible to us in the same way as our own, then the other would no longer be truly other to us and we could not speak of intersubjectivity in a meaningful way at all. This difference is a necessary condition for the possibility of an interrelation with others.<sup>97</sup>

Additionally, though we cannot access the other's experience as if they are our own, this evasive excess of the other is itself accessible to us. While living individuals enjoy an enkinaesthetic consonance and direct experiential understanding of one another

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> As we stated earlier, the egocentric (first-personal) givenness of human experience is a necessary condition for intersubjectivity. Thus, as Zahavi correctly notes, 'far from being competing alternatives, subjectivity and intersubjectivity are in fact complementing and mutually interdependent notions'. Dan Zahavi, 'Beyond Empathy: Phenomenological Approaches to Intersubjectivity', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 8, no. 5-7 (2001), 151-167 (p. 166).

er, there always remains an elusive singularity or excess to the other, but one which can, at least to some extent, be felt and empathically understood as such (i.e. as elusive), even if it can never be adequately captured in speech or reflection. Commenting on this very matter, Hanne De Jaegher points out that this would explain ‘why inter-affection does not always happen instantly, but can sometimes take time, and also why we always remain “other” and different to each other to an extent as well’.<sup>98</sup>

Again, though, none of this means that the subject does not enjoy some manner of direct experiential access to the other. We have already explored in detail how this unfolds in the enkinaesthetic intertwining between self and other. In empathy, as we have stated, when the subject sees the other, when she perceives his body and its expressions, on the grounds of that perception, the subject is able to empathically co-perceive her inner experience. If we follow this line of thought in acknowledging that empathy has its own kind of originality (i.e. directness) and optimality which should not be measured against those proper to the givenness of one’s own self, we can assert that when I see my friend excitedly chatting from across the table, or when I see her grimace in pain, I do in fact have a direct experiential understanding of her inner experiences, and this without in any way compromising her alterity.<sup>99</sup>

This formulation represents a slight deviation from Husserl’s occasional way of describing the matter, when he states that empathy provides us with access to the experience of others, but not originally. Yet it is one that stands in line with his recognition that the demands placed on evidence in one domain do not necessarily transfer to those of others, and it ultimately better enables us to reconcile his occasional and seemingly

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<sup>98</sup> Hanne De Jaegher, ‘How We Affect Each Other: Michel Henry’s “Pathos-With” and the Enactive Approach to Intersubjectivity’, *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 22, no. 1-2 (2015), 112-132 (p. 126).

<sup>99</sup> Zahavi, ‘Empathy and mirroring’, in *Life, Subjectivity & Art*, ed. by Breeur and Melle, p. 232.

conflicting claims that empathy can provide us with an original experience of the consciousness of the other, and that the latter always in some sense remains an absolute alterity for us.<sup>100</sup>

In fact, if we focus closer in on the special form of apperception that is at work in empathy, then it becomes all the more apparent how this is achieved. As Husserl often states, this form of apperception is not an act of thinking or inference, but involves what he refers to as an analogical transference of sense, which is achieved via a passive pairing of certain aspects of the self and the other.<sup>101</sup> As we have seen, it is one's own body, as an interplay of ipseity and alterity, that serves as the basis for this transfer of sense. On our account, it is because the subject experiences its own body in a pre-reflective and non-objectifying self-sensing, and also sees and feels itself as an external physical object, that this sense of subjectivity can be apperceptively carried over and seen in the other. It bears noting, however, that we are not here describing a temporal genesis. This self-experience does not have to be temporally prior to that of the other. Rather, there simply needs to be a kind of self-givenness in order for the transfer of sense to be carried out.<sup>102</sup>

The groundwork for Husserl's account of pairing has already been laid. As we know, in his account of intentionality, Husserl finds that experiences are gradually sedimented and passively synthesised into patterns of understanding that continue to influence and shape the subject's subsequent interpretation or understanding of things. For instance, after having experienced a red apple, the subject's subsequent apprehension of a red apple, or other things that in some way resemble it, will contain certain passive

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., pp. 233-234. Husserl emphasises the absolute otherness of the other in *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität: Erster Teil: 1905-1920*, p. 6.

<sup>101</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, pp. 108-109, 111-113

<sup>102</sup> Zahavi, 'Empathy and mirroring', in *Life, Subjectivity & Art*, ed. by Breeur and Melle, p. 238.



associations — i.e. an analogical link — with its prior experience of red apples, as well other similar things, and will thereby influence the new experience — just as, conversely, the new experience can influence prior experiences.

Similarly, when I apperceive another human subject, my self-experience will serve as a 'primal norm' and fund of meaning, which can be passively transferred to the other.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, as our earlier analysis helps suggest, it is not only, or even primarily, the similar visual appearance of the other that inspires this analogical transference of sense. The fact that the other feels and behaves in ways similar to myself plays an important part in this as well.

However, it is something of an open question as to how this primal norm of the living subject should be understood. On the one hand, Husserl does emphasise the role of analogy in the apperception of others. On this reading, when the subject apperceives the other as a lived body, the analogical apperception of the other involves a representation of the subject's own self-experience, a representation that, as a matter of necessity, ultimately points back to the subject's original presentation to herself.<sup>104</sup> On the other hand, though, Husserl no less stresses the fact that empathy is not a mere reproduction of oneself; that when I apperceive the other, I do *not merely apperceive me myself at a distance*.<sup>105</sup>

Our earlier analysis of background feelings can help us better resolve these seemingly conflicting claims. While the analogy is not a perfect one, where attunements serve as a foil against which particular feelings and emotions stand out, so too the primal norm of the subject's self-experience, rather than functioning as a model, can be

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<sup>103</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p., 126.

<sup>104</sup> Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität: Erster Teil: 1905-1920*, pp. 251-252.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

understood as a foil against which the difference of the other can reveal itself.<sup>106</sup> In this case, while the subject's self-experience remains a necessary condition for the experience of the other, it is simply the foil against which the other can be immediately apperceived as she really is in herself, rather than the model in relation to which she would be but an altered projection.<sup>107</sup>

As Husserl recognises, this transfer of sense is not unidirectional but bidirectional or reciprocal.<sup>108</sup> Through its encounter with the other, the subject does not only experience the difference of the other in an immediate and genuine manner, but she can also experience herself as encountered as a living and breathing agent by a fellow world-directed subject, and thereby come to understand that she herself belongs to an objective common world. For one, the fact that the transfer of sense occurs as this 'mutual awakening' highlights the fact that the other who is encountered therein is not merely my own projection, but a genuinely sensing and experiencing subject in her own right.<sup>109</sup> While Henry was not wrong that Husserl did not fully recognise or appreciate the role of affectivity in our experience of other, this indicates that he was mistaken in suggesting that he did not sufficiently distinguish between how we experience objects and other living subjects. Moreover, this further indicates that, despite Henry's insistence to the contrary, as important as affectivity is in our experience of the world, it is not in and of itself able to provide us with all of the richness and diversity of experience. While the non-objectifying self-sensing of life provides the individual with a

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<sup>106</sup> The difference between the two cases in question is that whereas particular feelings stand out against the subject's attunements as peaks in the continuum of the subject's self-experience, the other stands out in its genuine otherness from the subject. For more on this matter, see Zahavi, 'Empathy and mirroring', in *Life, Subjectivity & Art*, ed. by Breeur and Melle, pp. 240-241.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 113.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

primal sense of self, empathic understanding provides the subject with a fuller and more complex self-experience.

It is worth noting, nonetheless, that in his later years, Husserl attempts to draw attention to the fact that our interrelation with others also unfolds on the level of normality and historicity.<sup>110</sup> On this account, the subject's experiences are in part steered by anticipations of normality.<sup>111</sup> When the subject constitutes and apprehends others and the world as a whole, she does so through certain normal structures and patterns of understanding that have been sedimented over time. Importantly, these typical structures and patterns include those of convention, which transcends any particular individual.<sup>112</sup> Therefore, as Zahavi notes, the individual's apprehension of things necessarily involves

indeterminate general demands made by custom and tradition: 'One' judges thus, 'one' holds the fork in such and such a way, etc. What is normal I learn from Others (and first and foremost from my closest relatives, that is by the people by whom I am brought up, and who educate me), and I am thereby involved in a common tradition, which through a chain of generations stretches back into a dim past.<sup>113</sup>

As a matter of course, then, when the aforementioned mutual awakening occurs in an empathetic transfer of sense, and the individual apprehends the other and herself as belonging to an objective, shared world, she necessarily does so in terms of these typical structures and conventional, handed-down (i.e. historical) norms and patterns of understanding.

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<sup>110</sup> As the preceding analysis demonstrates, Husserl himself clearly views intersubjectivity as consisting in various layers — something that has often gone overlooked by commentators.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126. Zahavi develops this point in 'Husserl's Intersubjective Transformation of Transcendental Philosophy', p. 234.

<sup>112</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität: Dritter Teil: 1929-1935*, ed. by Iso Kern (Den Haag, Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p. 611; Zahavi, 'Husserl's Intersubjective Transformation of Transcendental Philosophy', p. 234.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

Ultimately, Husserl appears to identify at least two basic kinds of normality. For one, there is the normality of those who have reached a certain level of linguistic and cognitive development; the normality of rational and healthy individuals of a certain maturity. In this case, the abnormal would include infants and those who deviate from physical and psychological norms (i.e. those who are deaf or psychotic).<sup>114</sup> At the same time, there would also be the normality proper to those individuals who belong to a particular home-world, and who thereby apprehend themselves and others through the language and handed-down norms that comprise the life-world in which they have been reared.<sup>115</sup> In this case, those who belong to foreign life-worlds would be regarded as the abnormal.<sup>116</sup> That is, at least until the foreign life-world in question is in some way experienced and apprehended as such, in which case its members can come to be seen as belonging to a '*foreign normality*'.<sup>117</sup>

This means that when any given subject apprehends things as valid and there for everyone, everyone here means those who satisfy the criteria for normality. However, as disagreements invariably arise between members of any given life-world, these differing positions, if or when they are synthesised into a richer view of the world, can help motivate a shift from the "'normal" objectivity' that belongs to a particular histori-

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> In brief, Husserl understands the life-world as the typical structures and linguistic and socio-cultural norms that underlie and make possible the universe in which the subject finds itself immersed. As such, it consists in the pre-theoretical and unthematic way of life that belongs to the individuals of a particular historical community. Given our present aims, we cannot delve into this matter at any further length. Husserl provides an extensive treatment of the life-world in the *Crisis*. It also figures in the *Cartesian Meditations*, and in *Experience and Judgment*. For an accessible and more extended study of Husserl's treatment of this matter, see Kevin Hermberg's *Husserl's Phenomenology: Knowledge, Objectivity and Others* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

<sup>116</sup> Zahavi, 'Husserl's Intersubjective Transformation of Transcendental Philosophy', p. 234.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

cal community, to a more “rigorous” objectivity’ that belongs to any and all living and breathing subjects.<sup>118</sup>

As this indicates, the constitution of an objective common world is an ongoing historical process. It is not a one-way street but consists in various layers that mutually motivate and modify one another. In sum, given the all-founding nature of affectivity, even the insights that are gleaned on these higher levels of objectivity would necessarily feed back into and be undergone on a non-objectifying affective level, leaving us with a rich interweaving of the objective and pre-objective life-worlds.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid; Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität: Zweiter Teil: 1921-1928*, p. 111.

## CHAPTER 6

### BECOMING FULLY ALIVE

The previous chapter allowed us to reach some determinations regarding the nature and essential structures of transcendental subjectivity, and to draw attention to the way in which phenomenology can still strive to attest to these structures. It remains for us to determine, in this final chapter of our study, how this shift to the philosophical attitude comes about. What, in other words, is the unity of motivation that enables the subject to take up this shift in attitude?

Moreover, if transcendental subjectivity no longer stands outside the actual historical world, but always already belongs together with it, then what ramifications does this have on the way in which the living subject can assume some distance towards the familiarity and obviousness (and absolutization) of the world that characterises the (thesis of the) natural attitude and come to a higher awareness of it as such? While the preceding analysis has allowed us to better understand that phenomenology is indeed one way in which the individual can pursue this goal, in light of these considerations, can it really be said that it is the only, or even the highest, one? To put it differently, is the problematisation of the subject's absorption in the world the privilege of the philosopher, or is it a broader movement or phenomenon that characterises other facets of life as well? And if so, how do these forms of life relate? Is there a highest form of life, an ideal way of knowing and attesting to who or what we are?

## 6.1 LIFE'S UNITY OF MOTIVATION AND THE NATURAL ATTITUDE

To begin to address these questions, let us turn to the work of Husserl. For Husserl, consciousness is ultimately understood as 'an absolute domain of being', and as a rational infinite process of self-constitution, which is determined in advance by God, understood as the ultimate logos or rational principle.<sup>1</sup> This leads him to view philosophy as the infinite task of coming to know this absolute foundation and of thereby achieving perfect self-justification (i.e. truth, total self-disclosure) for all of one's positions (i.e. by grasping the essence of things in evidence). In his eyes, it is this idea of philosophy, this idea of philosophy as rigorous science and first philosophy, that serves as the unity of motivation which enables the shift from the natural to the philosophical attitude.

Yet our studies require us to take another route. Insofar as all experience and knowledge is structured by the transcendental life of the subject in its original and ineluctable bond with the world, it follows that it is this worldly life of the subject that determines the course of consciousness as an infinite movement, and which thereby enables the individual to problematise her natural attitude and assume a philosophical attitude.<sup>2</sup> It is, in other words, the needs and drives of life, as entwined with and co-determined by the world, that serve as the unity of motivation which makes such changes possible.

It now remains for us to determine exactly how this process unfolds. The previous chapter revealed that, by virtue of its essential structures, the living subject first experiences and comes to be oriented towards the world and others through *enkinaesthesia*

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<sup>1</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 133-134.

<sup>2</sup> Given that, on our account, the subject can never wholly overcome the natural attitude, we will refer to any movement in which the subject assumes some distance toward her natural attitude as the problematisation of the latter.

and, in particular, through the feeling of trust, understood as the feeling of safety and confidence in one's openness and vulnerability to the world. By virtue of this affective orientation toward the world, we witnessed how the subject comes to accept, mimic and internalise the norms, language, and patterns of understanding of her lifeworld.

In our view, then, the living subject's cognitive belief in the independent existence of the world is founded upon this feeling of trust. On the basis of this feeling, the living subject uncritically accepts the absolute existence of the world and thereby takes its existence for granted; she comes to regard the objects, events and norms of the lifeworld as obvious and familiar.<sup>3</sup> In her infatuation with this lifeworld, the subject in the natural attitude sees no need to question its origin or constitution. In turn, this assured belief only further reinforces the subject's non-objectifying feeling of familiarity with the lifeworld, where familiarity is understood as a feeling of comfort and closeness.

On account of this trust and unreflecting acceptance of the norms, values and beliefs of her lifeworld, the subject in the natural attitude tends not to fully live up to the heights of her energy and her drive for self-growth, but to opt instead for familiar and safe patterns of action. The natural attitude is thus characterised by a certain stagnancy. The individual who relates to the world in this way invariably becomes lodged in a delimited set of feelings, habits, norms and beliefs, and, as such, even when boredom and dissatisfaction with her lifeworld begin to mount, she tends to feel unwilling to do anything to work her way out of it in any significant way. With the subject's discontent

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<sup>3</sup> In his later work, Husserl similarly comes to regard the natural attitude and the lifeworld as correlates. Indeed, as Luft writes, '[t]his correlation becomes so close in Husserl's latest years that the lifeworld and the NA [natural attitude] become almost indistinguishable from each other. This becomes evident when he speaks of a "natural world life" which has to be understood as an abbreviation of "living in the lifeworld in the NA". Every type of phenomenology of the lifeworld therefore includes the NA as its essential correlate and cannot disregard it without losing a necessary element within its account'. Sebastien Luft, 'Husserl's Notion of the Natural Attitude and the Shift to Transcendental Phenomenology', in *Phenomenology World-Wide Foundations - Expanding Dynamics - Life-Engagements: A Guide for Research and Study*, ed. by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Springer, 2002), pp. 114-118 (p. 118). Overcoming this natural attitude of the 'life world' is, however, necessary for Husserl, as *another way* to transcendental phenomenology that he had *already established* in *Ideas I*.



with the lifeworld and her not living fully, a drive for destruction and death, therefore, seeps into her flesh and begins to influence her feelings, actions, judgments, and so on.

Here stands the natural attitude that the living subject, in her basic bond with the world, can never entirely suspend. To be sure, certain experiences within the flow of life can alter (positively or negatively) or even annul the sense of trust the individual feels toward certain situations, individuals and ideas. Yet, given the strength of the subject's early fetal experiences, and the enduring passive associations and expectations they create, as well as the regularity with which the world continues to meet her needs in varying degrees throughout her life, at the most general level, her background feeling of trust in relation to the world remains over the course of her lifetime.

## 6.2 WONDER AND THE PROBLEMATISATION OF THE WORLD'S OBVIOUSNESS

If this is so, then it follows that the shift in question must be brought about by some type of shock or problematisation. In this case, our present aim would be well served by our taking up a study of the feeling of wonder or awe<sup>4</sup>. As we will show, the experience of wonder, as a particular affect, bears a close tie to the living subject's vital, instinctive curiosity, and it serves as one of the prominent ways in which the subject assumes some distance toward her unquestioning acceptance of her lifeworld. By investigating this matter, our study will have the secondary benefit of filling a significant hole in Henry's own analysis of affectivity. As much as Henry offers one of the most extensive and detailed accounts of the fundamental role of affectivity in the life of the individual, and in his conception of first philosophy as a philosophy of affectivity in partic-

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<sup>4</sup> We use the concepts of wonder and awe interchangeably.

ular, one does not find an especially robust analysis of the concrete forms taken by affectivity.<sup>5</sup>

However, as Jean-Sébastien Hardy points out, as soon as we take into consideration Henry's unrelenting focus on drawing out and establishing the seminal importance of affectivity, this glaring deficiency becomes at least somewhat more understandable.<sup>6</sup> On Henry's account, particular affects are '*a secondary or derivative mode of affectivity*', such that 'its interest is only accessory, if not accidental'.<sup>7</sup>

Whatever the reason for this relative neglect in Henry's work, this calls for a more precise analysis of the intelligence of particular affective sonorities.<sup>8</sup> For our present purposes, wonder is a most apt starting point.<sup>9</sup> The Latin equivalents of wonder are *admiratio* (i.e. admiration) and *mirabilia* (i.e. marvels or miracles). These Latin cognates suggest that wonder has to do with an attunement to the excellent (i.e. virtuous) and the rare. Along these lines, in the dictionary, wonder, taken as a noun, refers to a feeling of surprise mixed with admiration (or reverence), as caused by something beautiful, unfamiliar, unexpected or inexplicable. As a verb, to wonder means to feel curious, to feel astonishment, admiration and doubt.

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<sup>5</sup> Jean-Sébastien Hardy, for one, makes this point in 'Life Turned Against Itself: Is There a Theory of the Passions in Michel Henry?', *Analecta-Hermeneutica* 8 (2016), 149-165.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> As Jean-François Lavigne puts this: 'Henry's phenomenology of feeling (*sentiment*) has paved the way for a transcendental and phenomenological inquiry into affectivity and its multiple modes, understood as the primary source of all intelligibility. It calls for a precise and diverse analysis of the universe of the affects, which would be able to show the intelligence within affectivity, in a burgeoning state, in its original form'. Jean-François Lavigne, 'Conclusions...en forme d'ouverture' in *Michel Henry: Pensée de la vie et culture contemporaine*, ed. by Jean-François Lavigne (Paris: Beauchesne, 2006), pp. 315-318 (pp. 315-317).

<sup>9</sup> Though wonder plays a prominent role in problematising the subject's natural attitude, this is not to say that it is alone in this respect. Other feelings can do so as well, and, indeed, we will touch on some of them at a later point. Needless to say, though, we cannot provide an exhaustive account of these sentiments here. Our aim is to merely lay the groundwork for understanding some of the more prominent affective sonorities that carry out this function.

Apart from the above-mentioned characteristics, the feeling of wonder also tends to involve a feeling of humility, ‘a significantly smaller sense of self’, as well as a ‘need for accommodation’, which is to say, a feeling ‘that the stimulus cannot be assimilated into current mental structures, thus necessitating changes to basic beliefs, categories, and schemas’.<sup>10</sup> As Amie Gordon and others have further noted, there is evidence to suggest that the feeling of wonder can have positive social effects as well. Wonder, as a feeling of astonishment before a particular object or event, and thus as a self-transcendent experience, can intensify an individual’s feeling that she is a part of an intersubjective world that is greater than herself.<sup>11</sup> Altogether, then, the feeling of wonder has the ability to shake the living subject from the familiarity and obviousness of her natural attitude, and to compel her to rethink its significance.

We find further confirmation of this definition in the history of philosophy. In *The Passions of the Soul*, for instance, Descartes describes wonder as follows:

[w]hen our first encounter with some object surprises us and we find it novel, or very different from what we formerly knew or from what we supposed it ought to be, this causes us to wonder and to be astonished at it. Since all this may happen before we know whether or not the object is beneficial to us, I regard wonder as the first of all passions. It has no opposite, for, if the object before us has no characteristics that surprise us, we are not moved by it at all and we consider it without passion.<sup>12</sup>

As Spinoza notes, such wonderment is not only experienced in one’s relation to external objects, but also in the experience of oneself. In his words, ‘[w]hen the mind regards its own self and its power of activity, it feels pleasure, and the more so, the more distinctly it imagines itself and its power of affectivity’.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Amie M. Gordon et al., ‘The Dark Side of the Sublime: Distinguishing a Threat-Based Variant of Awe’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 113, no. 2 (2017), 310-328 (p. 311).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 310-311.

<sup>12</sup> Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume 1*, p. 350.

<sup>13</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. by Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992), p. 135.

Of course, we needn't necessarily agree with all aspects of these accounts. For example, Descartes tends to depict wonder as something of which the subject is always objectively aware. Yet it should be evident from our foregoing studies that this needn't be so. The subject can experience a primal sense of wonderment as a non-objectifying feeling of this or that. Her perceptual consciousness can be led blindly — in the sense of lacking noematic sense — through the world in a feeling of wonder.

Regardless, what these descriptions help draw out is the deep tie between the intentional structure of wonder, since wonder is always a feeling directed toward something, even if only in a non-objectifying manner, to the subject's instinctive curiosity and drive for self-enhancement, as well as its seemingly prominent role in problematising the obviousness of the lifeworld. When some aspect of ourselves or the world contravenes our primal sense of familiarity and confidence in it, the living subject undergoes a feeling of wonder or awe, understood as a blended feeling of astonishment, admiration, doubt, and heightened humility and curiosity. In turn, this feeling can arouse the subject to question and think about the norms of the lifeworld and how it has come to be as such, and these higher-order changes can themselves then feed back and be undergone as non-objectifying affective tonalities.

This is not to say that all experiences of wonder have this effect. Wonder can issue from a wide variety of stimuli: certain ideas, religious rituals or experiences, the sight of powerful cultural figures, nature, natural events, and so forth.<sup>14</sup> Yet not all of them will invariably exert enough allure on the living subject to elicit such a response. In what follows, we will limit ourselves to an analysis of those modes of experience that tend to elicit intense feelings of wonder, and which thereby figure as some of the more prominent ways in which the problematisation of the natural attitude is brought about.

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<sup>14</sup> Gordon et al., 'The Dark Side of the Sublime: Distinguishing a Threat-Based Variant of Awe', p. 311.

### 6.3 ART

As suggested earlier, the feeling of wonder or awe often appears to be brought on by the experience of something that strikes us as beautiful, although, to be sure, it does not only arise in the experience of beauty. Therefore, it stands to reason that art, as a high form of culture that concerns itself with creating and appreciating beauty, will figure prominently in the subject's experience of wonder. As we explored earlier, where things in daily life tend to abide by the principles of concentric construction and lead to 'muffled resonances that are [largely] inaudible due to the fact that they have already been heard', art, as a more rigorous and precise attempt to express the affective movements of life, generally proves more capable of producing 'unforeseen configurations' that appeal to our senses, that strike us with surprise and astonishment, and which lead us to wonder and contemplate the world.<sup>15</sup> Abstract art, for instance, with its 'overturned edifices, arborescent entities viewed from unrepresentable perspectives, metallic cones in a state of suspense, rays exploding like firework rockets, joined angles, enigmatic grids and diagonals launching an attack', can shake the individual from the familiarity and obviousness of the world by challenging her expectations, rousing her feelings in new, unexpected and even inexplicable ways, and by thereby bringing her to wonder and to delight in this intensification of her sense of agency and power.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, since the aesthetic principles that guide art are also those of the world, certain rare experiences in the latter can produce similar effects. Kandinsky provides us with a fine example of this. Famously, Kandinsky writes: "I regard the entire

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<sup>15</sup> Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, p. 140.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

city of Moscow [...] as the origin of my ambitions”<sup>17</sup>. His experience of the city leaves such a lingering impression on him that he strives to capture it time and again. Recounting a trip to the modest Medieval German town Rothenburg-ob-der-Tauber, after which he painting a work that would later be entitled ‘The Old Town’, Kandinsky writes:

[e]ven in this picture, I was actually hunting for a particular hour, which always was and remains the most beautiful hour of the Moscow day. The sun is already getting low and has attained its full intensity which it has been seeking all day, for which it has striven all day. This image does not last long: a few minutes, and the sunlight grows red with effort, redder and redder, cold at first, and then increasing in warmth. The sun dissolves the whole of Moscow into a single spot, which, like a wild tuba, sets all one’s soul vibrating. No, this red fusion is not the most beautiful hour! It is only the final chord of the symphony, which brings every colour vividly to life, which allows and forces the whole of Moscow to resound like the instruments of a giant orchestra. Pink, lilac, yellow, white, blue, pistachio green, flame red houses, churches, each an independent song — the garish green of the grass, the deeper tremolo of the trees, the singing snow with its thousand voices, or the allegretto of the bare branches, the red, stiff, silent ring of the Kremlin walls, and above, towering over everything, like a shout of triumph, like a self-oblivious hallelujah, the long, white, graceful, serious line of the Bell Tower of Ivan the Great. And upon its tall, tense neck, stretched up towards heaven in eternal yearning, the golden head of the cupola, which among the golden and coloured stars of the other cupolas, is Moscow’s sun. To paint this hour, I thought, must be for an artist the most impossible, the greatest joy. These impressions were repeated on each sunny day. They were a delight that shook me to the depths of my soul, that raised me to ecstasy.<sup>18</sup>

These pointed reflections bear out the intense feeling of wonder (i.e. astonishment, admiration, curiosity, etc.) that the world can arouse, and which can to some extent wrestle an individual from the familiarity and obviousness of the lifeworld. Prior to all judg-

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-18. We find another compelling example of this wonderment in Kandinsky’s account of his experience of his first paintbox: “I can still feel today the sensation I experienced then — or, to put it better, the experience I underwent then — of the paints emerging from the tube. One squeeze of the fingers, and out came these strange beings, one after the other, which one calls colours — exultant, solemn, brooding, dreamy, self-absorbed, deeply serious, with roguish exuberance, with a sigh of release, with a deep sound of mourning, with defiant power and resistance, with submissive suppleness and devotion, with obstinate self-control, with sensitive, precarious balance. Living an independent life of their own, with all the necessary qualities for further, autonomous existence, prepared to make way readily, in an instant, for new combinations, to mingle with one another and create an infinite succession of new worlds”<sup>18</sup>. Ibid., p. 29.

ment, this feeling of wonder can better attune the subject to the beauty of the necessity of things, which is to say, to their excellence (i.e. virtuousness), to their inner nature and astonishing uncanniness, which is rarely ever glimpsed. When this lightning strikes, however, as it did for Kandinsky, it can spur one on to an infinite creative activity. As Kandinsky writes, “I have only painted Moscow my entire life.”<sup>19</sup>

If we acknowledge that the so-called laws of art, the laws which provide the criteria for the success and failure of its works, are also those that orient the subject’s everyday existence within the lifeworld,<sup>20</sup> then introspective reflection on one’s experience of such artworks can indeed help enable the subject to problematise the obviousness of the lifeworld and to achieve some insight into how the sense of the latter is constituted by the hidden art of her soul and its essential structures.<sup>21</sup> For example, on the basis of the wonder an individual feels before a great artwork, she can reflect on her experience, whether on her own or with the assistance of art theorists, and eventually come to sense and know that her bodily needs, drives and desires are transcendental conditions of the lifeworld; that, accordingly, she is a meaningful (aesthetic) order of life who is responsible for the sense of the lifeworld; that the lifeworld is not something that exists on its own, independent of human beings, as something that does not necessarily say anything fundamental about who we are — as if the configuration of the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> As Henry writes, ‘[t]he greatest painters [...] have lived and presented their art as a mode of metaphysical knowledge’. Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> This would be introspection and reflection on an everyday level — mundane reflection, if you like — and not the more sophisticated phenomenological variety. Introspection is here understood as a reflective looking into one’s experience and the way of experiencing it. As Christopher Gutland argues, phenomenology, as a transcendental method, can be regarded as a more refined (i.e. systematic and scientific) form of introspection. As Gutland notes, while Husserl distinguishes his method from psychology’s inner observation, ‘he occasionally characterised it as introspection’. Christopher Gutland, ‘Husserlian Phenomenology as a Kind of Introspection’, *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (2018), 1-14 (p. 1); Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität: Dritter Teil: 1929-1935*, p. 23.

world is 'just the way things are' — but that the two are inextricably interwoven, such that the sense of the latter always speaks to the depths of our nature.

Indeed, there is nothing that prevents at least certain artists from attaining some measure of insight into their work and, by extension, the lifeworld. Needless to say, not all artists are privy to such insight. As is well known, Plato exiles the poets from the Republic,<sup>22</sup> in part, because their works appear to be divinely inspired; they appear to issue from some mysterious, non-rational impulse outside their own self. Hence the reason why artists often cannot themselves explain what they create.<sup>23</sup> That being said, while artistic works can indeed issue from the non-objectifying impulses of the individuals own life, given that such drives involve an objectifying moment, they are necessarily linked to reason, such that the latter are but a higher-level realisation of the former. Because of this, the impulsions that inspire works of art can be brought to the level of objectifying thought to some extent, even if not entirely, which enables the artist to reflect on her productive activity and what it reveals about her lifeworld. To the extent this is the case, these newly won insights can in turn influence, and even enhance, the way the artist goes about her creative endeavours.

Kandinsky is an exemplary case of an artist who achieved this theoretical insight. Owing to the wonder he underwent in his experience of the city of Moscow, as we observed in our third chapter, Kandinsky lays out a detailed and extensive treatment not only of the so-called laws of art and beauty, but also of the essential and universal

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<sup>22</sup> Yet brilliantly uses 'myth' and 'myths' to develop and articulate his philosophy, i.e. mythos and logos are indistinguishable in Plato in some contexts. Of course, we cannot expound upon this further here.

<sup>23</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, trans. by Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 313-346.



role of sensibility in structuring the lifeworld, and in rendering it a fundamentally aesthetic one.<sup>24</sup>

While one needn't agree with all aspects of Kandinsky's insights, or Henry's interpretation of them, such reflective engagements, although not necessarily obtained through the same methods as phenomenology, can indeed shake the individual out of her dogmatic slumber and problematise the familiarity and obviousness of the world. In fact, it can hardly be denied that the novel or unfamiliar ideas found in such reflections, or in the history of Western thought more generally, can themselves serve as a source of wonder and thereby dislodge the subject from her natural attitude in a similar manner.<sup>25</sup>

It would therefore seem that the living subject can problematise her natural attitude and strive to know and attest to the hidden art of life and its essential structures in ways that stand outside of phenomenological philosophy. We know where Husserl stands on this matter. Husserl believes it to be the privilege of phenomenological philosophy to attest to the inner nature of the ultimate foundation of the world. As we've seen, and as other commentators have noted, Husserl believes it is the position of a transcendental spectator that 'enables us to best understand ourselves and our relation to what is'.<sup>26</sup> Because of this, as Bernet rightly notes, Husserl thought the performance of his transcendental reduction and its '(endless) theoretical investigation [...] to be the

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<sup>24</sup> Michel Henry, 'Kandinsky and the Meaning of the Work of Art', in *The Michel Henry Reader*, ed. by Scott Davidson and Frédéric Seyler (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2019), pp. 181-192 (p. 183); Kandinsky, *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, ed. by Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, p. 176.

<sup>25</sup> Amie Gordon identifies the ability of novel ideas to elicit a feeling of wonder or awe in 'The Dark Side of the Sublime: Distinguishing a Threat-Based Variant of Awe', p. 311.

<sup>26</sup> Dodd, 'Attitude-Facticity-Philosophy', in *Alterity and Facticity*, ed. by Natalie Depraz and Dan Zahavi, p. 74. As Dodd asks, '[i]s it really the case that the relation between the world and the life that lives in and in terms of the truth of this world can best be understood *vis-à-vis* this model of an intellectual grasp of an object, a *theoria*[?]' Is the "understanding" of the world basic to life — life as it is lived, not life as a theoretical construct — an understanding for which the world is a spectacle? Is the knowledge that we are seeking when we turn to philosophy, the understanding which reveals the origin of the sense of the world in general, predicated on the realization of a transcendental spectator (*Zuschauer*)? When we speak of "understanding", even "conceiving" the world, does such theatrics exhaust the *meaning* of such conception?' Ibid.

best and worthiest form of human life'.<sup>27</sup> However, with the acknowledgement of the absolutely basic character of bodily life, and its immersion and involvement in an intersubjective and historical world, this can no longer be the case. In undergoing an intense feeling of wonder or awe before the beauty of an artwork or that of the lifeworld, the subject who is sufficiently moved can find herself compelled to problematise and clarify the natural attitude by producing and/or studying works of art.

In fact, insofar as the hidden art of life consists in the pre-individual, pre-reflective and non-objectifying self-sensing of the living present, in that mysterious and sublime moment of life that can be indeterminately felt but never seen, it may be said that, historically speaking, the arts have generally displayed a greater attentiveness to the inner nature of life than has philosophy, with the latter's dominant focus on the objectivity of things.

While Henry thus remains correct in the limited sense that an engagement with the arts, as a form of high culture, does indeed serve as a prominent way in which the subject can come to know and attest to the oft-overlooked inner nature of things and their fundamental structures, he is mistaken in contending that thought and other objectifying acts of consciousness do not play an essential role in this process. As a result, thinking and living — i.e. the theoretical and the practical — should not be separated as they are in Henry, with the former being secondary and subordinate to the latter, and eventually giving way to it, as we witnessed in the previous chapter. While it is true that an excessively analytical approach to the world can potentially sully one's experi-

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<sup>27</sup> Rudolf Bernet, 'Perception as a Teleological Process of Cognition', in *The Teleologies in Husserlian Phenomenology*, ed. by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht, Netherlands: D. Reidel Publishing), pp. 119-132 (p. 131).

ence of the very object one wishes to illuminate,<sup>28</sup> thinking is itself a practical activity, and can just as well play a positive role in enabling the individual to further draw out the living heart of things throughout the course of her lifetime.

#### 6.4 LOVE

In any event, when the living subject is appropriately moved to problematise the natural attitude, this movement involves a sense of self-giving love. Wonder bears a close family tie to love in that it often arouses the latter, understood as a feeling of deep affection and admiration for something, as an intense feeling of joy, power and calm. As this description of agape love suggests, we find that agape love always involves an element of eros (i.e. a passion or desire motivated by an object). Such love always involves our being directed toward something that strikes us as alluring. In this respect, we would agree with Felix Ó Murchadha when he states that ‘to think *agape* without *eros*, or *eros* without *agape*, misses an essential messiness in love, a lack of purity, a contamination in love’.<sup>29</sup>

We recall that Henry himself regards life as a movement of self-giving (agape) love. While we obviously cannot agree with all aspects of his account — for example, that agape love is the self-love of a radically immanent and non-intentional life; that it is

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<sup>28</sup> In his discussion of the neurotic personality, Otto Rank similarly identifies overthinking as something that can be deleterious to the life of the individual. See Otto Rank, *Beyond Psychology* (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), pp. 48-50.

<sup>29</sup> Felix Ó Murchadha, ‘Love’s Conditions: Passion and the Practice of Philosophy’, in *Thinking About Love: Essays in Contemporary Continental Philosophy*, ed. by Diane Enns and Antonio Calcagno (Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 81-97 (p. 87). For a critical reading of Henry’s treatment of love, and of some of the assumptions and prejudices that predominate in conceptions of love within contemporary French phenomenology, see Christina M. Gschwandtner, ‘The Phenomenon of Kenotic Love in Continental Philosophy of Religion’, in *Thinking About Love: Essays in Contemporary Continental Philosophy*, ed. by Diane Enns and Antonio Calcagno (Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 63-80.

indifferent to anything outside itself and without any trace of eros<sup>30</sup> — what remains pertinent in this account is his acknowledgment of the central role love plays in the life of the subject, as well as his understanding that this love is not merely a feeling but an infinite praxis or action.

Indeed, it bears noting that Husserl was not without an appreciation for the importance of love either. In some of his late manuscripts, Husserl describes a personal and pure love for an absolute ought or value that is more basic than the subject's perception of a particular good as that which is objectively best. As Ullrich Melle remarks, what Husserl stresses here is that '[o]ne has to distinguish between the objective value and the same value as an individual, subjective value of love. A pure and true love is not only a value-perception, but a loving embrace and choice of the value out of the most inward centre of the subject'.<sup>31</sup> For Husserl, this absolute value, vocation or calling of the living subject consists in an affection that precedes rational explanation, but which also necessarily involves an element of choice and decision. As a calling that issues from the heart of the individual, as Melle indicates, Husserl finds that “to go

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<sup>30</sup> As Jean-Sébastien Hardy points out, in his late, unpublished manuscripts, 'Henry's philosophy of love culminates in some daring consequences: "Dialecticians say: to love is to treat [the Other] as an absolute value; but that is false. Jesus saw John and *loved* him; that definitely does not mean that Jesus treats John as an absolute value; *to love someone is to be totally free from him [...]; I would not mind if you were not there anymore.*" In this sense, what distinguishes pure love and mundane love (lived through the impassionate lenses of jealousy, envy, competition, mimesis, etc.) is not the *direction* of the feeling (love for the other vs. egoistic love), but more profoundly the fact that true love has no direction and is indifferent to anything outside the gratuity of its affective revelation. In other words, the joy of the living comes from a "love without alterity", a love for life itself. This astonishing thesis was programmed to be at the center of Henry's last project that he never had the chance to finish, *Le livre des morts*, and gives us an idea of the notion of "clandestinity" that he wished to develop in this writing'. Hardy, 'Life Turned Against Itself: Is There a Theory of the Passions in Michel Henry?', p. 160. While we might agree with Henry that the living subject can and does undergo a love for life as a whole, this love cannot take place outside the lifeworld. Moreover, though such love is not dominated by competitiveness, jealousy or the desire to possess and control, that it is completely indifferent to the other — i.e. to her various worldly attributes and existence — to the point that one would not mind if she were not there anymore, seems to us to be quite wrong. We can agree that love involves a kind of releasement (*gelassenheit*) or letting-be, in the sense of desiring that the other be free, that she realise her full potential and become who she is, whether that means her remaining here with me or not, but none of this requires the bizarre and, ultimately, inhuman sense of detachment for which Henry advocates.

<sup>31</sup> Ullrich Melle, 'Edmund Husserl: From Reason to Love', in *Phenomenological Approaches to Moral Philosophy: A Handbook*, ed. by John J. Drummond and Lester Embree (Dordrecht: Springer, 2002), pp. 229-248 (p. 238).

against this value is to be untrue, to lose oneself, to betray one's true "I", which amounts to an "absolute practical contradiction". We have to follow the call of our individual conscience; we have to realize and preserve our true genuine self, be true to our deepest self, to the absolute ought of our pure love'.<sup>32</sup> However, as commentators have noted, Husserl's account of this love remains sketchy, and he ultimately does not provide a systematic account of its relation with reason.<sup>33</sup>

Be that as it may, what remains pertinent in Husserl's account is that love issues from a deep affection that precedes rational explanation and which takes the form of a personal calling. In keeping with the foregoing analysis, we would slightly diverge from Husserl in pointing out that this calling does not only strike but is to some extent carried out by the individual on an instinctual level. Inasmuch as the non-objectifying drives of the subject serve as the basis of the normativity of experience, the feeling of love can itself not only create and embrace this absolute value, but it can even guide some of the individual's low-level perceptual activities. As such, this non-objectifying feeling of love structures the way in which the subject can objectively evaluate and apprehend herself, others and the world as a whole.

In this way, through the experience of wonder and love, the subject can become dedicated to a vocation that problematizes the natural attitude and which involves her in an infinite creative activity. We say infinite because the living subject's primal feeling of the thing which arouses wonder and love in her flesh is one that, while inciting the subject to try and reflectively elucidate it, can never be wholly captured by any such attempt. In a poem entitled 'Les Pivoines', Philippe Jaccottet speaks to this quite well

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 244. Husserl goes on to discuss a community of love in *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität: Zweiter Teil: 1921-1928*, pp. 165-184, 192-204.

<sup>33</sup> Melle, 'Edmund Husserl: From Reason to Love', in *Phenomenological Approaches to Moral Philosophy: A Handbook*, ed. by John J. Drummond and Lester Embree, p. 247.

when he observes how the flowers he sees ‘abide in another world at the same time as in this one; that’s exactly why they slip away from you, obsess you’.<sup>34</sup> The flowers abide in an affective non-objectifying lifeworld that, owing to the individual’s finite, perspectival nature, can never be entirely thematised in the objective world of reflection. Consequently, this sets off an energy in the subject that can endlessly feed on itself. The more the subject feels compelled to pursue this calling and to further her experience of it by actively taking it up on the level of a theoretical investigation, the more she discovers that remains to be explored, and the more she discovers, the more she tends to feel compelled to further pursue and clarify this experience, which involves an endless problematisation and clarification of the natural attitude. Because of this, the metaphysical desire to achieve perfect self-presence can never be entirely overcome. Love thereby remains an infinite self-giving movement in that, for the subject who finds herself properly motivated, it drives her beyond merely engaging in disparate, arbitrary and finite relations that come and go, and compels her to give her life to an endless creative renewal of her given project(s) — as in the case of Kandinsky, who only painted Moscow his entire life. In so doing, love better enables the individual to fulfil her ongoing need for self-growth.

## 6.5 ETHICS

Yet this is not to say that the experience of wonder which fosters a problematisation of the natural attitude can only, or even primarily, be brought about through such aesthetic experiences and pursuits. As we noted earlier, a sense of wonder can arise not only in

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<sup>34</sup> Philippe Jaccottet, ‘Après beaucoup d’années’, in *Oeuvres*, ed. by Jose-Flore Tappy, Herve Ferrage, Doris Jakubec and Jean-Marc Soudillon (Paris: Gallimard, 2014), p. 821.

the experience of beauty, but in the experience of something unfamiliar, unexpected or inexplicable. And since, as we've seen, human sensibility is aesthetic and ethical in nature, such that the two enjoy an internal link, it follows that the ethical domain, itself a form of high culture, would similarly serve as a prominent site from which such experiences can take root.<sup>35</sup>

We believe we find a most striking example of how this may unfold within James Mensch's *Ethics and Selfhood*. In this work, Mensch describes an encounter between an individual and a Jewish woman who all of a sudden and quite unexpectedly shows up at one's door in Eastern Europe during the time of the Holocaust. Why is it, Mensch asks, that some people in this situation decided to help the stranger at their doorstep and others did not?<sup>36</sup> As I have stated elsewhere,

[i]n a unique and extreme case such as this, as Mensch points out, reductive psychological explanations as to why certain individuals opted to provide this stranger with assistance and others did not seem inappropriate. Apart from the fact that such extreme circumstances, characterised by 'risk and secrecy', do not lend themselves to being replicated in an experiment and thereby made available in an objective and public knowledge, Mensch notes that there is reason to doubt that the decision to help can be adequately accounted for by maintaining that such individuals were of an altruistic personality.<sup>37</sup>

Mensch goes on to correctly note that

[t]he altruist has a history, a personality that develops over time, one that comes finally to expression in a more or less fixed pattern of behaviour. This is the behaviour of a person who seeks others out, searching for ways to help them. By contrast, the rescuer, particularly in the East, does not seek to rescue, but rather is

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<sup>35</sup> Henry himself suggests something along these lines when he writes that '[e]thics develops in the footsteps of life and follows its progress step by step. This happens through dramatic experiences that are nothing other than the various ways in which life comes into contact with its own Basis. Each time one of these experiences occurs — for instance, when a man allows his brother or enemy to go ahead of him or when he recognizes Life in the face of the Other — a law of ethics is affirmed [...] with an irresistible force [...]. [T]he greatest force arises within such experiences and allows one to experience that one is alive. This experience resides even in the smallest of our gestures, the most routine acts, inasmuch as the greatest force resides in them too and makes them possible'. Henry, *From Communism to Capitalism*, p. 112.

<sup>36</sup> James Mensch, *Ethics and Selfhood* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 112.

<sup>37</sup> Schaefer, 'Bonds of Trust: Thinking the Limits of Reciprocity in Heidegger and Michel Henry', pp. 305-306; Mensch, *Ethics and Selfhood*, p. 112.

sought out. The Jew appears — perhaps standing at the door. Confronting him, the rescuer faces an immediate decision, one that he has probably not thought through before. Since the circumstances surrounding rescue are not those of normal life, the idea of his having developed a pattern of response for this extraordinary situation is highly problematic. Given that the circumstances surrounding rescue in the East were unprecedented, they could play no part in the psychological history of those suddenly facing them.<sup>38</sup>

The uniqueness of this situation appears to preclude our explaining this charitable moment by referring to an altruistic personality that the individual in question may have cultivated over the years.

Under these circumstances, the sudden appearance of the other is truly miraculous. We submit that, in a flash, the unexpected and inexplicable appearance of the stranger strikes certain individuals whose nature and experience has not closed them off from such experiences with an intense feeling of wonder or awe that rouses them out of the familiarity and obviousness of their lifeworld.<sup>39</sup> Though the decision of the individual in this position to assist the other cannot issue from past patterns of understanding and action, the sudden compulsion to charitably assist the other can spring from forces deep within the instinctual life of the rescuer, of which the rescuer herself may not even be aware. In this moment of wonder, the individual whose enkinaesthetic consonance with and trust in others has disposed her to accept the norms and habits of her lifeworld, now sufficiently astonished, humbled and attuned to her underlying interconnection with others, may all of a sudden undergo a heightened sympathy for or empathy with the stranger and offer her assistance, perhaps even before she is objectively aware of what she is doing.<sup>40</sup> Like the stranger herself, the individual's primal evaluation of this

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> It would appear that, whether through nature, nurture, or some combination of the two, some individuals are simply more open to experiences of wonder than others.

<sup>40</sup> This appears to reveal a tragic character to life: the very enkinaesthesia and feeling of trust that gives the subject to unquestioningly accept the lifeworld and take it for granted is the same one that, when paired with the wonder it helps make possible, enables the subject to assume some distance towards this natural attitude and begin to inquire about its significance.



situation and the offer of assistance comes like a flash, as a non-objectifying compulsion or feeling, before the subject herself has time to objectively assess and cognise what she is doing.

As we witnessed earlier, however, this feeling of wonder can prompt the subject to reconsider the nature of her experience in the lifeworld. Extraordinary experiences such as this challenge the subject's assumptions about the lifeworld and, whether at once or over a period of time and in conjunction with other similar experiences, can imbue the subject with a need to engage in introspective reflection on the nature of the lifeworld.

As studies confirm, such ethical experiences can have much the same effect on those who observe them from the outside. As Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt's seminal study indicates, when a subject observes another person engage in an extraordinary moral act, or, say, when they read about such acts, this can give rise not only to a feeling of wonder or awe but to a feeling of elevation as well, where elevation is understood as a 'warm' and uplifting feeling, which can foster 'a desire to become a better person, or to lead a better life'.<sup>41</sup> For the individual who bears witness to such ethical experiences in some way or other, by reading about them for example, the ensuing wonder and elevation can foster in said individual a love that embraces this charity or generosity of spirit as an absolute value, and which compels her to want to be more generous and to lead a better (i.e. good) life.

As a part of this, this primal sense of wonder, elevation and love can, at its height, urge the individual to problematise her natural attitude by introspectively re-

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<sup>41</sup> Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt, 'Approaching awe, a moral, spiritual, and aesthetic emotion', *Cognition and Emotion*, 17, no. 2 (2003), 297–314 (p. 305). For more on elevation as an important ethical feeling, see Jonathan Haidt, 'Elevation and the positive psychology of morality', in *Flourishing Positive Psychology and the Life Well-Lived*, ed. by Corey L.M. Keyes and Jonathan Haidt (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2003), 275-289. Of course, this is not to say that elevation — or other such feelings — always fosters a desire to lead a better life.

assessing her understanding of the lifeworld and the way in which it is given. That is to say, it can prompt the individual to reflect, either on her own or by engaging with the history of ideas (i.e. meta-ethics, psychology, etc.), on the intersubjective nature of the lifeworld, on how it is that other human beings appear to exert this pull on her, and on what moral beauty or goodness are and how they come to be constituted and understood as such. For example, the aforementioned feelings may eventually lead the subject to inquire as to whether generosity is, as Descartes suggests, a wonder tinged with love, which consists in the rightful esteem the subject has for her own worth, for her ability to master her passions and control her willing in a positive or negative way, on account of which she can have the proper esteem for others as agents who have the same ability?<sup>42</sup> In other words, such experiences can lead the subject to consider whether generosity is a virtuous will, understood as a form of self-control,<sup>43</sup> or whether it issues from non-objectifying drives that we can never entirely control, as our example concerning the individual who all of sudden offers assistance to the stranger who inexplicably darkens her doorstep appears to suggest.

However, insofar as the living subject's ethical experience of others, and of the sense of wonder, love and generosity that can be aroused in such experiences, can never be entirely thematised and known with absolute certainty, and, what is more, inasmuch as there is always more that can be given in such experiences, it follows that this problematisation of the natural attitude via ethical experience and reflection is an endless creative activity (i.e. an ethical creativity). For the subject who finds herself duly touched and motivated by wonder, and who, in a pre-reflective manner, lovingly em-

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<sup>42</sup> Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume I*, pp. 384-388. As this suggests, there is a strong family bond between trust, wonder, love and generosity.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 385.

braces such an ethical way of life as an absolute value, such combinations of wonder and love have the ability to urge her towards an infinite creative activity, which consists in the subject's continually striving to problematise and clarify the ways in which such experiences, and the concepts and norms that emerge from them, are given.

## 6.6 THE DARK SIDE OF FEELING

These reflections provide us with some indication of how the problematisation of the natural attitude can be undertaken outside of phenomenology. In experiencing wonder before a beautiful artwork or event, by encountering a novel or startling idea, or by undergoing a dramatic or unexpected experience of another human being, the individual can find herself motivated to problematise her natural attitude by engaging in the arts, that is, by producing and reflecting upon works of art, or in ethics, by striving to be more generous, to lead a good life, and to reflect on what this entails and how such concepts arise and are constituted in the first place.

In both of these cases, it is a positive feeling of wonder that prompts the problematisation of the natural attitude. Though, historically, this positive feeling of wonder has received comparatively more attention, there is also a negative valence of wonder or awe, which itself plays an important role in shaking the subject from the natural attitude. This would be a threat or fear-based variant of wonder. Indeed, despite the comparative neglect of this flavour of wonder, as Keltner and Haidt have found, this threat-based sense of wonder appears to be at least as primordial as the more positive variety.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Keltner and Haidt, 'Approaching awe, a moral, spiritual, and aesthetic emotion', *Cognition and Emotion*, p. 306.

The forces of the world that astonish us are often no less frightening. As Rainer Maria Rilke declares in the first of his *Duino Elegies*, '[e]very angel's terrifying'.<sup>45</sup>

Things can elicit a positive or negative valence of wonder depending on the context and the way in which the experience is evaluated or appraised. As in all cases of wonder, as Gordon reports, this threatening valence can spring from a variety of stimuli, such as upsetting works of art (say, a painting with violent, jagged lines, or a piece of ominous music, etc.) certain ideas ('learning "about the horrors of the Vietnam war"'<sup>46</sup>), or other 'social (e.g., a dominant, powerful individual), natural (e.g., lightning), or even more metaphysical (e.g., contemplating one's place in a vast universe) experiences'.<sup>47</sup> Historically, one such prominent source of this threat-based wonder is religion, where God is often described as both wondrous and petrifying, and as an all-knowing and, at times, vindictive entity.<sup>48</sup>

Yet a more quotidian source of this threat-based wonder, which is common to all people, regardless of race or creed, and which plays a prominent role in all of our lives, is that of the death of another human being, and the awareness of death — as our awareness of the punctuated or finite character of human life — that this fosters. In an

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<sup>45</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies and The Sonnets To Orpheus*, trans. by A. Poulin Jr. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975), p. 5. As Rilke writes, '[a]nd if I cried, who'd listen to me in those angelic orders?/Even if one of them suddenly held me/to his heart, I'd vanish in his overwhelming presence./Because beauty's nothing/but the start of terror we can hardly bear,/and we adore it because of the serene scorn/it could kill us with. Every angel's terrifying./So I control myself and choke back the lure/of my dark cry. Ah, who can we turn to,/then? Neither angels nor men, and the animals already know by instinct/we're not comfortably at home/in our translated world. Maybe what's left/for us is some tree on a hillside we can look at/day after day, one of yesterday's streets,/and the perverse affection of habit/that liked us so much it never let go./And the night, oh the night when the wind/full of outer space gnaws at our faces; that wished for,/gentle, deceptive one waiting painfully for the lonely/heart — she'd stay on for anyone. Is she easier on lovers?/But they use each other to hide their fate./You *still* don't understand? Throw the emptiness in/your arms out into that space we breathe; maybe birds/will feel the air thinning as they fly deeper in themselves.' *Ibid.*, pp. 5-7.

<sup>46</sup> Gordon et al., 'The Dark Side of the Sublime: Distinguishing a Threat-Based Variant of Awe', p. 321.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

unpublished manuscript (A6-12-4415), Henry in fact draws close to describing this negative valence of wonder that the death of the other can arouse in us:

[o]nly one thing is absurd: the disappearance of a subjectivity, the death of someone. This is what leaves us absolutely uncertain and which causes anguish and makes us doubt our very being, makes us doubt that which is indubitable [...]. This is what makes the world collapse, puts it in question and surprises it, what surprises us — the death of the beloved does this, but it does this in an accidental way in that it is the beloved [and] we live as if we are justified by the beloved — the death of the beloved does all of this, because it is the death of someone.<sup>49</sup>

We find in this account of the death of the other a number of the central characteristics of threat or fear-based wonder that are identified in Keltner and Haidt's seminal study of the matter. Apart from the primal sense of astonishment, surprise and doubt which colour all forms of wonder, this negative valence, as experienced here in the presence of the dead other, diminishes the individual's sense of control, and it fills her with a sense of dread, anguish and despair.<sup>50</sup>

On this account, what elicits this fear-based wonder before the dead other is the lifeless visual form of her bodily life. In this case, it is the living subject's awareness of the bodily life of the other, and not, as Heidegger suggests, language which determines the subject's conceptual understanding of death.<sup>51</sup> As Henry observes, it is when we witness the cessation of the other's bodily life, and we see ourselves in the place of the

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<sup>49</sup> Michel Henry, 'Notes préparatoires à L'Essence de la manifestation: la subjectivité' in *Revue Internationale Michel Henry* 3 (2012), 93-215 (p. 195). St. Augustine reaches a similar conclusion in his *Confessions*, trans. by Garry Wills (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), pp. 131-135, 139. Kirk J. Schneider addresses how the death of another human being can elicit a negative form of wonder or awe in *Rediscovery of awe: Splendor, mystery and the fluid center of life* (Minnesota, Paragon House, 2004). Melanie Rudd, Kathleen Vohs and Jennifer Aaker also speak to this matter in 'Awe expands people's perception of time, alters decision making, and enhances well-being', *Psychological Science* 23, no. 10 (2012), 1-7.

<sup>50</sup> Keltner and Haidt, 'Approaching awe, a moral, spiritual, and aesthetic emotion', *Cognition and Emotion*, p. 308.

<sup>51</sup> For a fine critique of Heidegger's account of our being-towards-death, see Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, 'The Enigma of Being-Toward-Death', *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 29, no. 4 (2015), 547-576.

other, as one who will invariably meet with the same fate, that we become conceptually aware of death, of the punctuated or finite nature of human life.<sup>52</sup>

To be more exact, as Maxine Sheets-Johnstone points out, in perceiving the dead other, the subject sees a being who still has the same familiar form as when she was alive, yet all movement on her part has ceased now and forevermore.<sup>53</sup> The corpse of the other is thus a ‘unitary phenomenon, but it is also dual insofar as it is adjoined at the same time and without felt contradiction whatsoever to its ghost’.<sup>54</sup> In death, the other who once sensed and moved like me is not merely perceived as behaving in an unusual way, but as having undergone ‘an utter change of being’ — she has become ‘*another* other’, a ‘muted and distant Thereness’.<sup>55</sup> In her stillness, the other no longer entreats me nor I her; the two no longer participate as agents in a community of shared projects in the world — and this not only for the time being, here and now, but for always.<sup>56</sup>

At the same time, the death of the other does not spell the loss of all intersubjective significance. There remains a residual sameness in the appearance of the dead other. As Johnstone writes,

there is a sense of former encounters with this now still and solitary Other; there are images of commonly lived moments. No matter the radical transfiguration, the Other remains Other. A particular past creeps in and with it a sense of ongoing consistency enduring through change. Throughout the variety of recollections and images, a persistent sameness anchors a once-communal life. An aura of continu-

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<sup>52</sup> Henry, ‘Notes préparatoires à L’Essence de la manifestation: la subjectivité’, p. 195. That being said, Henry himself does not explain how the subject can see herself in the place of the dead other. Antonio Calcagno engages in a reading of Henry’s account of death in ‘Reclaiming the Possibility of an Interior Human Culture?’.

<sup>53</sup> Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, ‘On the Conceptual Origin of Death’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 47, no. 1 (1986), 31-58 (p. 48).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-48, 50.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

ity impresses itself upon the kaleidoscope of remembrances and images, however fleeting or vague.<sup>57</sup>

In this way, the lifeless visual form of the deceased other is effectively apperceived as belonging to the density or texture of a shared past, so that the subject apperceives a temporal continuity between the living past of the other and the strange stillness of her present.<sup>58</sup>

Because of this, what the living subject perceives in her encounter with the dead other is not only her newfound separation and strangeness from her, but an individual temporality or stream of life that has now ended once and for all.<sup>59</sup> On the basis of this experience, though, in a ‘*reverse* analogical apperception’, the living subject can realise that, though she is different from the dead other in that she is still alive and moving, it is also the case that she too is a continuity, a stream of experience that is separable from, but which also enjoins her to, a communal past with others; that she too is ‘a persistent sameness across a manifold of change’; that she too is ‘a present in continuity with a past’.<sup>60</sup> And it is in the apperception of this combination of similarities and differences between herself and the dead other that the living subject becomes aware in an intense moment of fear-based wonder or awe that she will one day find herself there where the deceased other is now; that her life, like that of the other, as a ‘temporal open-endedness’ of feeling and movement, is one that does not stretch on forever, but which is finite and which will inevitably be destroyed.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 52

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 52-53.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 53, 56.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

Though he does not explain how it happens, when this awakening occurs, Henry acknowledges that we do indeed return to ourselves ‘destroyed’, that is, we return to ourselves in a state of deep sadness and dejection over the fact that the life we love will eventually end.<sup>62</sup> Such negative sentiments, undoubtedly, can be deleterious to the life of the individual inasmuch as they can diminish her curiosity, make her more liable to conform to societal norms, cause her to act in an aggressive or destructive manner toward herself (say, by refusing to work her way out of her melancholy) or towards others, and lead her to further entrench herself in ways of thinking that deny or neglect the subjective sources of the sense of the world. Yet, despite this, studies indicate that negative sentiments can also bring about positive developments in the life of the individual.<sup>63</sup> As in the other cases we have explored, intense moments of fear-based wonder or awe can intensify the curiosity of the subject; they can, as Viktor Frankl reports, urge an individual to reconsider her understanding of what life is, and what can and cannot be taken away from it.<sup>64</sup> In so doing, fear-based wonder makes it possible for the subject to question the lifeworld and the way in which it is constituted, and it can motivate her to embrace this pursuit, in whatever form it should take (i.e. art, ethics, science), as an absolute value that she continuously takes up over the course of her life.

This is true not only for fear-based wonder, but for other negative feelings as well. While perhaps not as powerful or as transformative as the wonder undergone in the experience of the deceased other, other objects and events, and the sense of depression or boredom they inspire, can bring about similar results. Take the experience of

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<sup>62</sup> Henry, ‘Notes préparatoires à L’Essence de la manifestation: la subjectivité’, p. 195.

<sup>63</sup> Naturally, this can occur with a single experience or as the cumulative result of a series of them.

<sup>64</sup> Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), pp. 116-119. See also his *Recollections: An autobiography of Viktor E. Frankl* (New York: Perseus Publishing, 2000).



boredom. The issue of boredom arose briefly in our earlier discussion of the malaise that Henry sees as dominating life in the modern world. Though he does not address the matter at length, Henry makes it clear that, in his eyes, boredom arises when the living subject does not participate in actions that rise to the height of her needs and thereby release her energy. When this occurs, boredom is experienced as ‘an affective disposition in which unemployed energy is revealed to oneself. At each moment in boredom, a force emerges; it inflates by itself, and stands ready. It is ready for whatever use one would like to make of it’.<sup>65</sup> For Henry, then, boredom is a positive energy that issues from the subject’s failure to deploy her creative force. It is, as Antonio Calcagno notes, ‘the pure feeling of the force to potentially create’, but one that is never properly fulfilled.<sup>66</sup> Boredom is, in other words, an ‘arousal with no release, a priapism of affect’, which, as a result, often occurs together with feelings of malaise, melancholy and lethargy.<sup>67</sup> Hence the typical image of boredom as a kind of ‘*living death*’, as something that largely removes the individual from the productive, social flow of life.<sup>68</sup>

In fact, as this suggests, though Henry appears to be correct in stipulating that boredom always involves a certain energy, it must also be acknowledged that boredom can be something of a drain on one’s life-force. Boredom can sap one’s strength, perhaps even to the point of death.

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<sup>65</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*, p. 109.

<sup>66</sup> Antonio Calcagno, ‘The life that is not purely one’s own: Michel Henry and boredom as an affect’, in *Boredom Studies Reader: Frameworks and Perspectives*, ed. by Michael E. Gardiner and Julian Jason Haladyn (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 53-63 (p. 54).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Barry Sandywell, ‘The dialectic of lassitude: A reflexive investigation’, in *Boredom Studies Reader: Frameworks and Perspectives*, ed. by Michael E. Gardiner and Julian Jason Haladyn (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 38-52 (p. 43). Indeed, Henry’s account of barbarism can very much be seen as a kind of living death.

As our earlier analysis of the malaise of life bore out, Henry regards such negative affective sonorities as merely blocking and stagnating the growth of life.<sup>69</sup> Boredom blocks the subject from engaging in actions that rise to the height of her needs, and instead directs her to forms of engagement that are antithetical to the growth of her aesthetic-ethical sensibility, such as listlessly sitting in front of the vapid expressions of television (aesthetics), or participating in nihilistic forms of action (ethics). In so doing, though, boredom only intensifies its own sense of inertia and dullness, and it fosters in the subject a growing hostility towards life, and a desire to destroy herself and life in general. This appears to be confirmed by other accounts of boredom. As Barry Sandywell writes, we often forget ‘how much boredom is a hidden motive of aggression and the destructive impulse (including, of course, the self-destructive impulse). Boredom — the lassitude of the soul — is the other side of inarticulate aggression and violence (consider the problems of disaffected youth as generated through chronic boredom)’.<sup>70</sup>

For all that, we should not overlook the fact that negative affective states such as boredom can also urge us on to productive and creative forms of action. As Calcagno notes, the psychoanalyst Adam Phillips, in a development of the work of Donald Winnicott, argues that ‘boredom is an important experience for children to undergo’, though one whose value is often overlooked in the world of adults.<sup>71</sup> In Phillips’s words,

[i]s it not, indeed revealing, what the child’s boredom evokes in adults? Heard as a demand, sometimes as an accusation of failure or disappointment, it is rarely agreed to, simply acknowledged. How often, in fact, the child’s boredom is met by that most perplexing form of disapproval, the adults wish to distract him – as though the adults have decided that the child’s life must be, or be seen to be, endlessly interesting. It is one of the most oppressive demands of adults that the child

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<sup>69</sup> Henry, *Barbarism*. p. 110.

<sup>70</sup> Barry Sandywell, *Dictionary of Visual Discourse: A Dialectical Lexicon of Terms* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 177.

<sup>71</sup> Calcagno, ‘The life that is not purely one’s own’, in *Boredom Studies Reader*, ed. by Gardiner and Haladyn, p. 159.

should be interested, rather than take time to find what interests him. Boredom is integral to the person's taking one's time. While the child's boredom is often recognized as an incapacity, it is usually denied as an opportunity [...]. Boredom, I think, protects the individual, makes tolerable for him the impossible experience of waiting for something without knowing what it could be. So the paradox of the waiting that goes on in boredom is that the individual does not know what he was waiting for until he finds it, and that often he does not know that he is waiting.<sup>72</sup>

Phillips here provides a compelling insight into the positive role that a negative affect such as boredom can play in enhancing the life of the individual. In holding the individual at a certain remove from the productive, social flow of life, boredom, while undoubtedly a painful, lethargic and, in its more extreme moments, even depressing state of affairs, simultaneously provides the living individual with the opportunity to take her time and to let the world fly up in front of her, to let it present itself to her in a new light, such that the subject can actually find and pursue something that genuinely interests her and that is worthy of her interest.

We needn't look any further than the history of Western thought for examples of how this can occur. Precisely because of the boredom they endured, philosophers and countless other writers and artists — from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, to Gustave Flaubert, Henrik Ibsen and Arthur Schopenhauer — found the motivation to withdraw from the familiar and the everyday and to seek out the uncanny, essential nature of things. In so doing, such individuals, through their reflections and the works they created, were able to problematise the natural attitude and to illuminate the way in which the lifeworld is constituted, thereby opening life to new vistas of growth and joy.

This suggests a more nuanced understanding of the growth of life than we found in Henry. Where Henry views the positive and negative affects as standing in some-

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<sup>72</sup> Adam Phillips, *On Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Unexamined Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 69-70, 77-78. Calcagno comments on this in 'The life that is not purely one's own', in *Boredom Studies Reader*, ed. by Gardiner and Haladyn, p. 160. As Gilbert remarks in an essay by Oscar Wilde, 'to do nothing at all is the most difficult thing in the world, the most difficult and the most intellectual'. See Oscar Wilde, *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde: The Plays, the Poems, and the Essays including De Profundis* (Hertfordshire: Woodsworth Library Collection, 2007), p. 996. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is a famous example of this.

thing of a binary relation, where the former fulfils life's need for self-growth and the latter only ever blocks it, we find that this is clearly not the case. While negative sentiments such as fear-based wonder and boredom, and its attendant malaise, can certainly prove so debilitating that they more or less swamp and cripple the individual, pushing her down an all but irrecoverable path of self-destruction, as we have demonstrated, they can also enable life to grow and to attain to new heights, as in the problematisation of the natural attitude. Accordingly, this means that the negative or destructive forces in the world — i.e. sense-denying works of art, nihilistic or viciously relativistic ethical world-views and forms of action, as well as destructive religious beliefs and practices<sup>73</sup> — would hold a similar potential.

#### 6.7 A CHORUS OF VOICES

These findings indicate that the living subject can problematise the natural attitude in a variety of ways. In the grip of a prominent affective state such as wonder (in its positive or negative valence) or boredom, the living subject can question and strive to shed a newfound light on the way in which the lifeworld is experienced by way of the production and study of works of art, ethics, science, philosophy and phenomenology. Though these disciplines may employ different methods, as they all seek to elucidate the essential structures of the world in its actuality, there is no 'modal gap' between them, and they can each help make explicit how the world is constituted.

Importantly, an experience that prompts such an affective state from any one of these domains does not necessarily urge the subject to respond to said experience, and

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<sup>73</sup> For more on the need for Heidegger's thought to admit the destructive potential of life and its cultural practices, see Calcagno, 'Reclaiming the Possibility of an Interior Human Culture?', p. 262.

to potentially problematise her natural attitude, from within the domain in which this experience arose. The individual who undergoes a positive experience of wonder before a beautiful work of art, for example, can, depending on the historical situation in which she finds herself, very well feel compelled to problematise her natural attitude, not by engaging in the arts — or not only by engaging in them — but by turning to ethical, scientific, philosophical and phenomenological pursuits, as themselves forms of high culture.

What is more, even when the subject undergoes a sense of wonder or boredom within a domain that does not in itself serve as a fitting ground for the problematisation of the natural attitude, such as within the religious sphere, the wonder or boredom that arouses her within that dimension of her life can nevertheless motivate her to take up other pursuits that do (i.e. philosophy).

In the case of religion, for example, Emmanuel Falque points to the promising dialogue that religion can undertake with philosophy when, commenting on the work of Maurice Blondel, he suggestively urges believers to acknowledge that

we can no longer be satisfied to ‘live as Christians and think as philosophers’ and, thus, to limit ourselves to a theology which is never, or almost never, fully realised (hence the nearly explicit refusal of Blondel to address properly theological notions like trinity, incarnation, resurrection, etc., always pretending instead that he should leave them for theologians). Instead, and inversely, we must ‘think as Christians and live as philosophers’, which means daring to address properly theological concepts — to think as Christians — by translating them philosophically in order to speak precisely of and to basic [finite] human experience, the mode of our humanity *tout court* — to live as a philosopher.<sup>74</sup>

Though we cannot explore this point at length here, as this suggests, the living subject can think as a Christian and live as a philosopher, and so, can undertake a religious philosophy by engaging in a study of theological concepts, such as that of the Incarnation,

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<sup>74</sup> Emmanuel Falque, *The Loving Struggle: Phenomenological And Theological Debates*, trans. by Bradley B. Onishi and Lucas McCracken (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), p. 251.

in an effort to draw out what they help illuminate about the nature of our finite human experience.

The unity that makes all of this possible is nothing other than the bodily life of the living individual, and its unrelenting need to grow its self-experience by questioning and clarifying its experience in ever-new ways and degrees. It is the bodily life of the subject which serves as the mutual point of intersection between all of these distinct disciplines (religion, philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, etc.).<sup>75</sup> There is therefore no uniform way in which the problematisation of the natural attitude must come about. The process is always specific to the contextual situation of each living individual.

None of this takes away the distinct role that phenomenology can play in this process. In keeping with the foregoing analysis, the impetus to take up phenomenology can arise from a variety of stimuli: from a sense of wonder or boredom that is undergone in the realm(s) of art, ethics, science, religion, or philosophy. In particular, the birth of philosophy from an experience of wonder has been well documented. In book one of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle states that ‘it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize’.<sup>76</sup> However this unfolds, phenomenology, as conceived here, retains its traditional function of providing a basic check on the scientific and philosophical conceptions of those aspects of the lifeworld that involve an experiential dimension.

Indeed, though the subject is more than capable of introspectively reflecting on the inner nature of the lifeworld and its essential structures, the phenomenological method provides her with a more stringent and refined way of practicing this reflective

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<sup>75</sup> As Falque correctly points out, ‘[e]ven given the necessary and legitimate distinction of philosophical and theological disciplines according to their *points of departure* (human life and the revelation of God, respectively), a new unity is nevertheless possible in their mutual *point of arrival* or *crossover* — at least in Christianity, this point in the figure of the God-man (theologian-philosopher).’ Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, p. 692, 1.2.982b10.

endeavour. The epoche enables the living subject to obtain a certain distance from her everyday absorption in the natural attitude and its unquestioned prejudices. Because of this, the living subject can, in the reduction proper, describe and thereby render explicit the essential structures of her contingent life, with as little intrusion from false assumptions as possible. Through eidetic variation, meanwhile, the subject is able to further test her claims about the essential structures of the lifeworld without relying on actual perception. This variation allows the subject to bypass the constraints of empirical induction and to obtain generalisable results. Finally, by sharing and discussing her results with others, the living subject can further test the validity of her findings.

However, this does not mean that phenomenology serves as an overseer of all disciplines. In fact, since not all disciplines — e.g. theoretical physics — are required to be wholly consistent with our lived experience of things, this cannot be the case. As a result, it is not clear that there is a highest form of life, an ideal way of attesting to who or what we are.

What our findings do, in part, suggest, though, is that nothing bars the phenomenologist — like the artist, scientist, etc. — from drawing on and engaging with other disciplines, as we ourselves have done here. In contrast to the phenomenological projects of Husserl and Henry,<sup>77</sup> then, we find that phenomenology and natural science, while distinct disciplines, are not necessarily incompatible, but can actually maintain a productive exchange. In fact, this includes not only the arts, ethics and science, but religion as well. Just as the religious person can strive to translate her theological concepts philosophically in an effort to further illuminate the nature of our finite human experience, so too the non-believing phenomenologist can draw on theological concepts in an effort to advance her study of life.

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<sup>77</sup> One could also mention Heidegger here.

Indeed, the living subject's study of this transcendental life may serve as motivation for the positing of such a belief. The Bible emphasises that God, as the sole, unique, self-sufficient creator of the world, is transcendent to human beings and exceeds conceptual human understanding. Yet it also states that he is related to human beings by way of their shared bodily nature. The Apostle Paul, for instance, speaks of Judeo-Christians as forming the body of Christ. In his words, '[j]ust as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body'.<sup>78</sup> It is owing to this perceived bodily intimacy that God is not an impenetrable abstraction, but something that the living subject can come to experience and in some sense know.<sup>79</sup>

As Mensch notes, the reason for emphasising this bodily intimacy between God and human beings has to do with the striking similarity between the living body and the transcendent God.<sup>80</sup> The aforementioned uniqueness and transcendence of the flesh can be seen as being, at least in part, a reflection of that of God. As with the flesh, the Judeo-Christian God of Israel is a unique singularity; he is known in only one instance, his own.<sup>81</sup> Because God is not one amongst many, but is unique, like our flesh, he necessarily transcends the common meanings of our language.<sup>82</sup> Our experience of God, like that of our flesh, involves this experience of an excess that cannot be fully conceptualised.

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<sup>78</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12-13.

<sup>79</sup> Mensch, *Decisions and Transformations*, p. 189.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., pp. 190-191.



That being said, what Mensch does not point out, and what must also be acknowledged, is that where some may see a divine presence in this living flesh, others will simply see the mystery of life, a life that is, at the end of the day, to borrow the language of Nietzsche, ‘human, all too human’. While life can serve as the motivation for a belief in God, contrary to what Henry suggests, it does not offer an irrefutable revelation of this divine presence. Life lends itself to secular and religious interpretation. While this point cannot be pursued any further here, this indicates that life provides a basis for ‘a common “grammar” with those who see things differently [i.e., atheists] and do not share our assumptions’, one that might help us to avoid ‘speaking different languages even though we may be using the same tongue’.<sup>83</sup>

Whether the phenomenologist is a believer or not, for the individual who is inspired to undertake this theoretical investigation of the hidden art of the soul, the embrace of this way of life involves the individual in an endless creative activity. As Kierkegaard knew, thought ultimately wants ‘to discover something that thought cannot think’.<sup>84</sup> In our case, it is the singularity of life in the world that the phenomenologist ultimately wants to reflectively elucidate. And, like the flowers that Jaccottet wrote about, it is because this life can only be felt in a vague or indeterminate manner but never fully thematised, and because there is always more in this life to be experienced, that the phenomenologist finds herself obsessed by this life, and, in an act of love and generosity, bent on endlessly seeking to further elucidate this life in ever-increasing levels of detail.

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<sup>83</sup> John Paul II, ‘Address of His Holiness John Paul II to the Bishops of Western Canada on their “Ad Limina” Visit’, Sunday October 30th, 1999, cited in Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology*, trans. by Reuben Shank (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), p. 133.

<sup>84</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 46.

In this way, the phenomenological attitude should not be understood as merely a way of looking at things in an academic manner, but must be seen as a way of life, as a style of presence that seeks to fully live up to and fulfil life's need for growth by continuously striving to reflectively elucidate life in as precise a manner as possible. Phenomenology joins the other forms of high culture (art, ethics, science, etc.) as a way of life wherein the living individual problematises the natural attitude and strives to become fully alive by living up to the heights of her energy and furthering the growth of life.

We are thus left with a chorus of voices that are brought together and sustained by an underlying love and generosity. This would be a community of love and generosity wherein each living individual pursues the same goal in his or her own way — i.e. the intensification of life by continuously striving to better come to know and attest to it via art, ethics, science, philosophy, etc. — and where all are duly motivated to support one another in their respective projects.

In so doing, though, the individual does not engage in an endless march of progress. By virtue of her finitude, the living subject's way of taking up these forms of high culture always involves an element of danger: in striving to better know and attest to the hidden art of her soul, the subject always remains at risk of making mistakes, of taking wrong turns, or coming to grief upon the limits of her abilities. An essential feature of such a way of life, therefore, is that they do not only allow us to further our awareness of the endless transformability of life, but they enable us to become explicitly aware of our imperfections and failures, and, in so doing, they endow in us the requisite motivation to continuously try and overcome these imperfections as much as we can, while simultaneously recognising that we can no more leap over them than we can leap over our own shadow.

More than that, though these ways of life enable the subject to problematise her natural attitude and become more explicitly aware of the nature of life and its essential structures, it never enables the subject to fully master her life and death drives. Try as one might, the subject will always, and for reasons that will forever remain mysterious to her, find herself engaging in aggressive or otherwise destructive forms of action that are deleterious to her own projects and well-being. There is no enlightenment that is capable of saving the individual from this possibility, as it is one that is essential to the nature of human life. One must welcome the irrational in life. Indeed, as we have seen, such destructive drives, and the negative sentiments they arouse in the flesh, are not only essential in shaping the course of our experience, but can themselves even play a positive role in furthering our growth. The living subject's attempt to better know and attest to the hidden art of her soul always remains a genuine struggle of competing interests and traditions.

## CONCLUSION

This work has sought to clarify the nature of transcendental subjectivity, and to determine whether and how the subject can endeavour to know and attest to its absolute foundation with its essential structures. Toward this end, we have investigated the work of Husserl and Henry, both of whom maintain that transcendental subjectivity functions as a pure field of experience that is not a part of the world, but which makes possible the meaningful appearance of that world, and whose ultimate foundation can, in some way, be given absolutely.

In addressing the work of Husserl, our first chapter began as an attempt to shed light on Husserl's search for a proper methodology for conducting phenomenology, as he defines it, which, in his estimation, will unlock the hidden power of this transcendental field of experience, and therein enable one to reflectively elucidate the inner nature of the transcendental ego and its essential structures. In doing so, however, we observed that, while Husserl makes it clear that it is an act of phenomenological reflection that brings about the split between the empirical and the transcendental ego, and that the two must be connected in some way, he does not adequately address the nature of this union at length. Ultimately, Husserl does not provide a sufficiently clear or detailed account of the identity of the transcendental ego.

Following this, in chapter two, we applied Husserl's methodology in an effort to determine the inner nature and essential structures of transcendental subjectivity, and to see whether Husserl's analyses support his assertion that the absolute ground of this primal self can in fact be given absolutely. We found that Husserl's own study of the living present, as the ultimate level of absolute time-constituting consciousness, places him in a precarious position. Though Husserl's phenomenology, as a rigorous science

that idealises presence, wants to suppose that it is possible for us to see the primordial ego in its actual occurrence as the source of conscious life, even if only as an ideal that lies in infinity, his analyses in fact point us in another direction. We have argued that Husserl's findings regarding the way in which the primal flow appears to itself as post-factual and differentially repetitive suggests that this event should be understood as an unconscious life that precedes and makes possible the immanence of consciousness. Insofar as this is the case, Husserl inadvertently reveals a primordial transcendence that exceeds intuition and presence, and which thereby functions as an anonymous level of sense that can never be presented to our gaze. Husserl's conception of phenomenology as a rigorous science that grants primacy to intuition and presence thus succumbs to a life that lies forever beyond the illuminating rays of our reflective regard.

In this case, though, it is not only the identity of transcendental subjectivity that remains less than clear. If the pre-temporal event of life stands as an anonymous level of sense that can never be captured or understood in terms of apperceptive objectification, then it remains to be seen just how it should be understood.

In a critical response to Husserl's intentional phenomenology, Henry advances a material phenomenology that endeavours to provide a more adequate account of the appearing of transcendental subjectivity. In so doing, we argued in chapter three that Henry advances our understanding of who or what transcendental subjectivity is and how it functions. He does this, in part, by drawing greater attention to the fact that the living subject's experience of its own body cannot be sufficiently understood by way of outer thing-perception, or from the analogy of thing-perception. Henry highlights the fact that the living subject does not first have a pure mental awareness of itself, which logically precedes and is independent of anything outside of consciousness, including its body, to the effect that it would only apprehend its body as its own from the outside

through the objectifying experience of touch. Rather, the living individual is its body, and it first comes to know itself in the radically immanent, non-intentional and non-objectifying self-affection of its bodily life. As such, the transparency thesis of lucid mind and opaque body that underpins post-Cartesian modern philosophies of human subjectivity in Locke, Hume, Kant and Husserl, is not phenomenologically defensible for Henry. Indeed, if the transcendental ego, as the ultimate foundation of the normative and meaningful character of experience, were reducible to a pure mental-conscious awareness, then it would need to be possible to identify a foundation, apart from bodily life and its practices, of the norms on account of which the meaning of life is constituted. Yet, as we have shown, this cannot be done, as the norms that make possible noematic meaning are irrevocably tied to the needs and practices of bodily life.

In drawing attention to this point, Henry draws attention to the fact that transcendental subjectivity is not a pure, absolute consciousness, but the actual, living and embodied individual. For Henry, though, this means that the reality of transcendental subjectivity is exhausted by the immanent and affective appearing of life, understood as an unconscious, generative movement. In his eyes, all reality and truth are reducible to the immanent and non-intentional self-affection of our flesh, such that the empirical ego, understood as the subject as she appears in the ecstatic order of appearing, in her finite, intentional acts, is mere illusion and unreality.

In this case, the most basic functioning of transcendental subjectivity must be understood as a matter of generation, as the immanent self-affection of a life that produces itself and all of its needs and drives. On Henry's account, it is this non-intentional and non-objectifying affectivity, in its absolute priority over intentionality, that unilaterally founds and drives all of our acts, and which is ultimately responsible for providing the subject with an absolute knowledge of all life and being. In a striking rever-

sal of tradition, Henry claims that it is the non-objectifying sensibility of life, and not any reflection or objective awareness, that enables the subject to come to know and attest to the absolute foundation and perfect self-presence (the *Parousia*) for which philosophy has always yearned. For Henry, the ultimate foundation of transcendental subjectivity can never be absolutely given to thought, but only ever in this non-intentional self-affection of life.

While this explanation and elaboration of phenomenology furthers our understanding of the inner nature of absolute subjectivity and its essential structures, it leaves us, nonetheless, with certain questions regarding the identity of transcendental subjectivity and how it is connected with the empirical ego. It remains a contentious point as to whether transcendental subjectivity should, at heart, be understood as human or divine. Furthermore, though Henry's work suggests that the unity between the transcendental and empirical ego must rest in our bodily life, he fails to account for how the two are united. Thus Henry cannot explain how a radically immanent and non-intentional life could possibly give rise to the ecstatic and intentional order of appearing. Instead, we are left with two bifurcated modes of appearing, with the result being that the immanent appearing of life, as the locus of all reality, finds itself radically separated from the ecstatic and unreal appearing of the world.

Although Henry, therefore, seemingly provides us with a more robust, concrete account of transcendental subjectivity, in that he emphasises its essentially affective, bodily nature, his account encloses the subject in a realm of immanence that is even further removed from the world than in Husserl. Indeed, in a strange twist of fate, while Henry harshly rebukes the history of Western thought for its ontological monism and its tendency to assume that there is only one mode of appearing — that of the world — Henry himself is guilty of an ontological monism, inasmuch he disqualifies the ecstatic,

intentional appearing of the world as an extreme unreality, and contends that all reality unfolds in the immanent and non-intentional appearing of life.

However, in putting the radical and divine immanence of life to the test of our everyday existence in the cultural world in chapter four, we found that this position is problematic. For one, if we admit, as Henry does, that in our everyday cultural lives, the life of the human individual can forget its basis in absolute life, and can consequently become weary and bent on the destruction of itself and life as a whole, then this poses problems for Henry's account of the divine nature of life. If life does unilaterally found and drive all of our conscious acts, then, as we argued, in opposition to the philosophy of religion that especially dominates Henry's later work, life itself would appear to be responsible for the genesis of this destructive impulse, and cannot therefore be divine or indestructible (i.e. eternal) in nature.

What is more, in his attempt to demonstrate how life's non-objectifying drive for self-growth initiates and steers the subject in her various cultural engagements, Henry's own analyses, for example, his study of how the subject recovers its basis in absolute life through an aesthetic, ethical and religious way of life, indicate that life does in some ways depend upon our finite intentional acts, as well as their corresponding objects, and that the latter play a crucial, and, in some cases, even positive, role in the various transformations of life. Further along these lines, it seems hard to deny that, as important as affectivity may be in driving the subject in her various acts, there are certain complex situations where it cannot steer the subject, and where it must rely on objectifying, intentional acts to take the lead and inform the subject as to what she needs to do.

Yet, if all of this is the case, then this places an even greater onus on Henry to account for the unity of life, that is, to account for how this radically immanent and non-intentional life gives rise to the ecstatic order of intentionality, such that the latter is able



to play this positive, edifying role in the development of the former. This, nonetheless, cannot be done, we argued, unless we admit that life possesses an ecstatic formal structure. Indeed, though Henry remained reluctant to admit that life contained any such fracture, we observed that the growing emphasis he places on life as a drive for self-growth itself suggests that life must involve an element of transcendence. The subject, after all, could not have a sense of its life, as either growing or diminishing, unless she retained her prior states through passive syntheses and thereby admitted a certain distance between temporal phases.

In this case, though, it fell to us to determine what these findings meant for our understanding of transcendental subjectivity and how the subject can strive to know and attest to its inner nature and essential structures. If we acknowledge the absolutely basic character of our finite bodily life, and admit that it possesses an ecstatic (intentional) formal structure and is ineluctably exposed to the lifeworld, are we still able to speak of transcendental subjectivity in a meaningful way? Can transcendental claims still retain their own distinct modality? In light of the above findings, in our fifth chapter, we ultimately pointed out that, in contrast to Husserl and Henry, transcendental subjectivity must be understood as the finite bodily life of the subject in its ineluctable bond with the world. Moreover, we argued that while our findings require us to modify or weaken our understanding of the sense of the transcendental as found in Husserl and Henry, they still enable such claims to retain their own distinct modality. The subject is still able to render transcendental claims by making explicit the necessary and universal structures of her contingent life in the world.

By putting a revised version of the phenomenological method into practice, we proceeded to try and shed further light on the hidden art of the soul and its essential structures. In doing so, we uncovered a new account of the living present, one that ac-

knowledges its ecstatic (intentional) formal structure, and which details how this primal flow is founded upon our bodies life-drive. In light of these findings, we argued that the living present, as the hidden art of the soul, must be understood neither as a pure and radical immanence (Henry), nor as a transcendence-in-immanence (Husserl), but as a primordial transcendence that exceeds and makes possible the immanence of consciousness, without ever being wholly contained therein. As such, we found that the innermost nature of transcendental subjectivity must be understood as an unconscious movement of creation, as a past that has never been present. The most basic functioning of the living present must be understood as a matter of creation, as the creation of an endless stream of affective tonalities. In this case, we suggested that there are two fundamental levels of constitution: that of creation, and that of noetic sense-bestowal, where the former can never be given absolutely. Contrary to the assertions of Husserl and Henry, our study forced us to admit that the ultimate foundation of transcendental subjectivity, as an anonymous level of sense, can never be given absolutely. It can neither be presented to our reflective regard (Husserl), nor can it wholly coincide with itself in the perfect self-evidence of a radically immanent self-presence (Henry). Instead, it can only ever be experienced in a vague or indeterminate feeling.

In providing this revised understanding of the innermost heart of the subject, we effectively set the phenomenology of life on a different path. On our account, transcendental subjectivity cannot be understood as an absolute consciousness (Husserl), nor as a divine, a-cosmic flesh (Henry), but must be acknowledged as nothing other than the finite, embodied person in her primordial bond with the lifeworld, which includes both life and death drives. In proceeding to elucidate some of the essential structures of this newfound transcendental subjectivity, we demonstrated that its ecstatic and intentional order of appearing can better account for the essential role of both the objectifying and

non-objectifying drives in the constitution of the world. We showed that every non-objectifying drive gives onto, and is thereby united with, an objectifying drive as a higher-order realisation of the former. In so doing, we were able to avoid Henry's problematic bifurcation of the two modes of appearing. Furthermore, by not only drawing on, but also critically modifying and extending, the later work of Husserl, Henry and other contemporary thinkers, we were able to show that the non-objectifying drives are still able to guide the subject's low-level perceptual acts, and to provide her with the full presence of things, while acknowledging that these non-objectifying drives do not unilaterally found the objectifying acts of consciousness. Our study revealed that while the non-objectifying drives enjoy an absolute priority over objectifying acts in terms of their transcendental genesis, nevertheless, the latter can give rise to the former. All in all, this provides us with a more robust, nuanced understanding of the finite nature of transcendental subjectivity, as well as its essential structures, including the life and death drives, and how they function in the constitution of the world. It enables us to overcome Husserl's relative neglect or downplaying of the role of the non-objectifying drives in the constitution of the world, as well as Henry's utter neglect and dismissal of that of intentionality and the objectifying acts of consciousness.

In light of these findings, in the sixth and final chapter, we argued that this emergent understanding of transcendental subjectivity forces us to conclude that, apart from phenomenology, the living subject can also problematise her natural attitude and come to know and attest to the hidden art of her soul through other high forms of culture, such as art, ethics, science and religious philosophy. Given the essential role of the needs and drives of life in determining the course of consciousness, we detailed how the natural attitude is founded upon the subject's felt sense of trust in the world. In our view, the subject problematises and assumes some distance from this attitude by virtue

of a type of shock, which is primarily undergone in a positive or negative valence of wonder, and in other negative feelings such as boredom. Therefore, Henry was not wrong to suggest that, in contrast to Husserl, the subject can attest to the heart of her being in ways of life apart from that of phenomenology. Yet the foregoing study forces us to acknowledge that, in contrast to Henry, these ways of life are intentional in nature; that this form of appearing is able to sustain both non-objectifying and objectifying drives; and that objectifying acts of consciousness play a positive, crucial role in problematising the natural attitude and in thus enhancing the life of the individual.

In drawing out the multiple ways in which the subject can attest to the fundamentals of her being, this study suggests that, in contrast to Husserl and Henry, phenomenology and natural science, though distinct disciplines, are not necessarily incompatible. Instead, our work helps reveal that there can be a fruitful dialogue between phenomenology, science and other high forms of culture. At the end of the day, it is not only phenomenology that properly understands life. Other disciplines and methods can also be appealed to as ways of coming to understand and further our knowledge of the hidden art of the soul.

At the beginning of this work, we quoted a statement from Jean-Luc Marion, which asserts that Henry's thought contains within itself 'a possibility still scarcely glimpsed'.<sup>1</sup> At the time, we wondered whether this might be taken to suggest that Henry's thought may demonstrate how the absolute foundation of transcendental subjectivity is given to us absolutely. We have since seen that both Henry and Husserl are unsuccessful in this regard. For all that, our study of both has furthered our understanding of the nature of transcendental subjectivity as the finite bodily life of the living person in

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<sup>1</sup> Henry, *Phénoménologie de la vie, Tome I*, p. 8.

her inescapable bond with the lifeworld, and it has enabled us to better understand that this life is creative and destructive in nature.

Finally, by drawing attention to the multiple ways in which the subject can come to know and attest to her essential nature, this work indicates that such ways of life have the potential to open the subject onto a community of love and generosity, to a communal way of life in which each individual is bent on furthering the growth of life in herself and others. Indeed, while our study has drawn attention to certain affective states that tend to shake the individual from her dogmatic slumber and rouse her to new heights of growth, there may yet be other such states, not to mention other forms of high culture — politics, for example<sup>2</sup> — which we have not been able to dwell upon, but which may serve as fruitful ground for further study, and for further development of this community of life.

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<sup>2</sup> Henry, for one, pursues this matter in his study of Marx.

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This bibliography is divided into two main sections. Section (A) contains a list of selected primary texts by (i) Edmund Husserl and (ii) Michel Henry. The English title and publication information for these works is given first in relation to each entry, with the original language title and publication details directly following it. Section (B) contains secondary literature cited or consulted of most relevance to the topic of this study.

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