

# Sleep and the Limits of Naturalization. An Exercise in Grenzphänomenologie

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, we examine the metaphilosophical relevance of the phenomenon of sleep, suggesting that it has the potential to not only enrich the analysis of limit cases but also to test some of the ideas concerning the possibility of naturalizing phenomenology and its limits. Insofar as sleeping allows for both a first personal and a third personal description and challenges the usual primacy of the first-person point of view, exploring sleeping under the prism of its import for the phenomenological method allows to illuminate the relationships between a first personal transcendental phenomenology and a third personal naturalized one. We do this by examining Husserl's treatment of sleep as a limit-case, and the problem of accounting for deep sleep from a first-personal perspective. Drawing from a Heidegger-inspired account of sleep, we argue that sleep demands for a type of approach that can be fairly described as ontological, and which reveals a new understanding of subjectivity as a dynamic unity of different modes of being. Although this approach challenges a first-personal based approach, it does not, however support the naturalization of phenomenology or undermine the project of a transcendental philosophy of experience.

## 1. Introduction

The study of limit phenomena has recently attracted a lot of attention in phenomenology. This is partly due to the recent publication of the volume of *Husserliana* explicitly devoted to *Grenzphänomene* as well as some other key vol-

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umes (in particular Hua/Mat VIII) where Husserl's late reflections on transcendental life and its limits has a salient place. Within such limit phenomena, birth and death had been the object of numerous studies (Depraz 1991, Dodd 2010, Geniusas 2010, Fraccaroli 2013). This is only natural since they are the limits of transcendental life, the farthest points of its stretching out (Hua/Mat VIII, C8, nr. 43). Since the seminal work of Anne Montavont (1999), many authors (Steinbock 2017, Mensch 2022), including ourselves (Ainbinder 2018, Vecino 2018; 2022), have underlined an important dimension of such phenomena, namely, its metaphilosophical import for the very possibility of phenomenology. Indeed, death and birth cannot be intentional contents of experience, and therefore cannot be accounted for by the usual phenomenological pathways based on intuition. They cannot even be part of a horizontal phenomenology that presupposes the possibility of intuitive fulfillment of the merely intended temporal phases of consciousness. And yet both death and birth seem to *necessarily* be part of the life of consciousness, they seem to be always presupposed in the temporally extended character of such life. As a consequence, death and birth seem to challenge the very foundations of the phenomenological method and push its limits. How can we account for a necessary part of consciousness that yet cannot be an intentional content nor given in any possible sense? Both Husserl and his followers struggled with this problem, providing partial solutions to this puzzle that, however, are far from casting away the problematic character of death and birth<sup>1</sup>.

Another limit-phenomenon that has recently become a topic of interest in phenomenologically inspired philosophy and cognitive science is the phenomenon of sleeping and its cognates (waking, dreaming, falling asleep and so on). In this case, the main focus of interest has been to use phenomenological tools to classify the rich variety of the phenomenon, on the one hand, and also to assess, especially in the realm of empirical psychology and cognitive science, the reliability of first personal reports to analyze sleep and its potential correlations to third personal quantitative methods (such as MRIs, polysomnographs, etc).

<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to provide a detailed account of such attempts. Focusing only on Husserl himself, we may suggest that there are methodological pathways he explores (such as the developments of constructive phenomenology; metaphysical ones (such as the claim that the transcendental I cannot die; for the metaphysical turn in phenomenology see Tengelyi 2014); quietist ones (birth and death cannot be phenomenologically analysed) and so on. For a detailed account see Vecino 2021.

Much less has been said, however, about the metaphilosophical import of sleep for the question concerning the possibility of transcendental phenomenology and its limits as well as the inquiry into its relation to naturalism, on the one hand, and metaphysics, on the other<sup>2</sup>. The reason for that may be that sleeping seems *prima facie* to be a more easily analyzable case than death and birth. This is because, on the one hand, it can more easily be brought into the temporal extension of consciousness via recollection and anticipations; on the other, because sleep is often accompanied by a kind of lucid consciousness in the form of dreams. However, there are some particular challenges introduced by the phenomenon of sleeping. We will focus mainly on the periods of dreamless sleep that seem to bring sleeping much closer to death and to the lack of any intentional content or consciousness whatsoever. As Malcolm noted “a person who is sound asleep, [is] ‘dead to the world,’ things cannot even seem” (Malcolm 1956, p. 26). But these phenomena had been usually treated in the literature either as marginal to sleeping in general or as mischaracterized (for example Thompson, 2014: p.11 thinks, in relation to dreamless sleep, that the difficulties for a subject to report an experience cannot *eo ipso* count as a proof of the absence of any experience).

The aim of this paper is to address the metaphilosophical question about how certain limit phenomena challenge the standard understanding of phenomenology as a reflection that excludes or even rejects any type of third-personal approach to subjectivity. Focusing on sleep is promising, since sleep is a phenomenon that, on the one hand, is uncontroversially part of the life of the subject and, on the other, seems to have, at least in its dreamless form, no intentional content. Considering this, it may be tempting to think that sleeping can only be accounted for from a third personal perspective as a natural phenomenon, and yet phenomenology can provide a richer picture where the first-personal element can still be incorporated and complement third-personal scientific pictures. Developing some ideas from our previous work (Ainbinder 2018, Vecino 2018) we will suggest that sleeping has the potential to not only enrich

<sup>2</sup> An exception in this respect is Mensch 2022, who however analyses sleep, birth and death in parallel and does not identify a special feature of sleep that would make a specific contribution to the debate.

the analysis of limit phenomena but also to test some of the ideas concerning the possibility of naturalizing phenomenology and its limits. It is not our aim in this paper to offer a phenomenology of sleep (in the guise of recent developments in microphenomenology). It is not our aim either to provide an exegetic account of Husserl's treatment of sleep in his lessons and manuscripts nor it is to directly address the problem of the possibility of the naturalization of phenomenology. Rather, more modestly, we intend to show how a complex case such as sleep exhibits the need to adopt a broader approach in the study of subjectivity. Precisely since sleeping allows for both a first personal and a third personal description and challenges the usual primacy of the first-person point of view (which becomes much less reliable when it comes to sleep phenomena), exploring sleeping under the prism of its import for the phenomenological method allows to illuminate the relationships between a first personal transcendental phenomenology and a third personal naturalized one.

## 2. Varieties of sleep.

One of the first things to note is that a taxonomy of sleep states is not an easy thing to achieve from the point of view of phenomenology. While from the side of neuroscience, there is nowadays a more or less settled consensus regarding the five stages of sleep (NREM 1-4 and REM), from the first-personal perspective that characterizes phenomenology, sleep is not a topic that has gotten a lot of attention, presumably because the experiences of a sleeping subject are difficult to access, if not completely inaccessible, from a first personal point of view.

In Husserl's work, sleep is mentioned numerous times, often in a metaphorical way, as a means for explaining other topics such as temporality or affection. For example, Husserl characterizes the sinking into the past of the now-phase as a kind of falling asleep (Hua XI, 178). His dealings with sleep in a direct manner can be found mainly in late manuscripts from the C-group and manuscripts gathered in *Husserliana* 42, dating all the way from 1908 (Hua 42, 137). They are centered around deep sleep or sleep without images, which is set apart from dreaming. While dreaming involves an active I that in fact continues to have experiences in the dream state; deep or dreamless sleep is a completely passive state where there is no affection, no interest and no sensory experience. This

stark separation is also manifest in the fact that Husserl will often discuss dreaming in the context of phantasy<sup>3</sup>, and deep sleep in the context of temporality and affection.

In “L’endormissement”, Natalie Depraz points out that Husserl operates with a rudimentary distinction between dreaming, deep sleep and wakefulness, which is not enough to account for the different modes that make up the spectrum of sleep. She proposes a new and more varied distinction made of twelve different states that include daydreaming, insomnia and sleepiness, amongst others (Depraz 1997, 73). Evan Thompson also speaks of the hypnagogic state as a rich and underexplored stage of sleep, which is made up of different experiences that are given subjectively and do not necessarily show up in third-personal observation such as an EEG (electro-encephalograph) (Thompson 2015, 119).

All these different forms of experience associated with sleep and wakefulness lend themselves to a phenomenological analysis that can be more or less detailed depending on how available the experience is for the subject undergoing it.

The different stages of sleep show a large variation in terms of awareness that certainly deserves to be examined. Our sense of self may change drastically during dreams, and the distinction between subject and object appears to weaken and fade during deep sleep. Because our first-personal awareness diminishes, it is increasingly difficult to account for these variations from a phenomenological point of view. At the lowest pole of the spectrum, dreamless sleep appears to be closed off to any kind of description. If we consider our experience of being asleep, we might think that we are not conscious at all during, at least, a big part of our resting hours. This has led some authors to deny or question the possibility of a phenomenology of sleep. Most notably Jean-Luc Nancy claims in *La tombe du sommeil* that the sleeping self is no longer for-itself and becomes, much like an object, an in-itself (Nancy 2007, 33) echoing Sartre’s characterization of death in *L’être et le néant* (Sartre 1993, 547). From a different perspective, Dieter Lohmar raises a methodological concern when it comes to analyzing dreams, which leads him to consider that the observation of sleep is not sufficiently controlled to attempt a phenomenology of sleep (Lohmar 2008, 160)

<sup>3</sup> Although there aren’t many references to dreaming in volume 23 of the Husserliana series, Husserl speaks of a *Traumphantasie* and *Traum-Ich* to describe the experience of dreaming as a quasi-experience (Hua 42, 500). For a more detailed account of dreaming, see Rabanaque (2018).

From a third personal perspective, the advances made in the realm of the science of sleep provide us with some crucial information in order to “fill in the gaps”. We know that there is some brain activity during all stages of sleep, which varies from faster to slower, and higher to lower wave-frequency and amplitude. In his book *Waking, dreaming, being*, Evan Thompson attempts to put into dialogue these findings from neuroscience with a phenomenological approach - along with teachings from Indian philosophy and meditation practices, which we will touch upon later on. He invokes for this the integrated information theory (IIT) (Tononi 2004) which is particularly amicable with a phenomenological understanding of the mind, insofar as it seeks to find the physical conditions that would allow for a subjective feeling of experience. According to IIT, what we understand as a conscious experience involves various cognitive processes working all at once such as “*selective attention, working memory, sequential thought, and action guidance*” (Thompson 2015, 255). More complex and integrated brain responses signal higher brain activity and thus a wakeful state, whereas during sleep, the influence between different neural systems in the brain breaks down. This would explain why we don’t have any recollection of enduring the time of sleep, even though both neuroscience and, as we will see, phenomenology, point to some form of conscious activity taking place. While REM sleep, usually considered the stage where the majority of dreaming happens, is characterized by a more intense form of activity, during stages 3-4 of NREM sleep, also called slow-wave sleep, brain activity diminishes and slows down.

### 3. Dreamless sleep.

As the deepest form of sleep, dreamless or deep sleep is a state where first personal awareness is at its lowest. There is no relief, no interest and no affection. The Ego is in a state of pure passivity. Husserl refers to it as a state of numbness (*Dumpftheit*) (Hua XIV Beilage XX; Hua 4, 107) where the Ego loses its grip over the world. Unlike the case of dreaming, there is no possibility of returning to the experience in reflection, and thus no way of accounting for the time spent in slumber.

Let’s look at a quote where Husserl describes the state of deep sleep:

“The unconscious I is in Nirvana; its willing and doing is a dying of all interest, it is moved by nothing, that is to say, it is moved as something which is not moved

in its interest; as something which is without any interest, it does not move, it does not do anything, it does not experience, it does not see anything, hear anything, accomplish anything, etc. However it can wake up” (Hua 42, p. 14)

The potential for waking up signals the way into a possible phenomenology of sleep.

Even when a description of a sleep state is not possible, this does not mean that sleep is completely closed off to a phenomenological analysis.

In order to conduct such analysis, however, a peculiar methodological approach is required. Firstly, it is necessary to move beyond the perspective of a static phenomenology. A possible reflection on sleep would find its place in the context of a genetic phenomenology, one that already takes into consideration the duration of experience. Indeed, sleep cannot be accounted for without time: we can understand sleep once we have woken up, and consider it has occurred during a past period of time. The nature of this understanding is what is at stake in a phenomenological account of sleep. Since we cannot go back to the experience of being asleep, it might seem that self-awareness was completely lacking during this time. This would entail that we can only have a type of inferential approach to our own sleep: we would need external clues to let us know that time has passed and, most importantly, to regain our sense of self and the world around us. But this does not seem to be the case in everyday experience. If I consider my own recollection of waking up, I find that, more often than not, I don't need to consult the clock to know that some time has passed, or look around me to know I am in my bedroom. Except on some rare occasions, the recognition of myself and the environment around me is an already achieved process. This can be accounted for in phenomenological reflection in the following manner.

Firstly, for Husserl, the flow of immanent time-consciousness can only allow for beginnings and endings that happen already within constituted time, but it does not begin or end itself (Hua 11, 378; Hua 14, 154; Hua/Mat 8, 97). While within factual life we seem to experience an interruption of our stream of experience, from the perspective of transcendental subjectivity, this would not be possible. Therefore, if there is potential for waking up, this means consciousness was never fully absent: there cannot be a gap during deep sleep since there would be no way of explaining its awakening afterwards. This can be considered a type of *logical* argument that Husserl usually resorts to when considering limit-cases. We must presuppose some form of minimal consciousness remains during sleep, if we are to make sense of it in retrospective. As Nicolas de

Warren puts it: “*Consciousness can only awaken on the condition that consciousness has put itself to sleep, taken in its transcendental significance: consciousness has constituted a temporary retirement from itself.*” (De Warren 2010, 293).

What happens during deep sleep, if not a complete loss of consciousness, is a diminishing of interest and affection to a *Null-Punkte* or *Null-Grenze* (Hua Mat VIII, 99).

a mute and empty life, so to speak, a dreamless, empty sleep, is conceivable as a life that also had this necessary structure and that appeared in perception in a passive and interior manner, but without any prominence, and therefore without any apprehension [of it] by the ego, without any play of single affections and acts such that the ego did not come on the scene, so to speak, and the slumbering ego was mere potentiality for the ego cogito. (Hua 11, 380; Husserl 2011a, 469).

Not only does consciousness wake up, but it wakes up to the same life with the same memories and anticipations as before, which means sleep does not alter the unity of the temporal flow:

*In factual life* we find the periodicity of sleeping and waking, where waking is at the same time waking to an available sphere of memories which (apart from dreams, which we believe are entirely absent in dreamless sleep) is united synthetically with the new waking sphere in form: there is a gap in experience, a memoryless sphere in between, in which things and events continued (Hua Mat VIII, 156-157)<sup>4</sup>. (author’s emphasis)

It should be noted that the gap in experience here refers to what is perceived “in factual life”, which means that sleep, as other limit-cases in Husserl’s approach, marks a point of divergence between a factual or empirical perspective and a transcendental one. While for the empirical subject in objective time, sleep is a lost or empty period, for transcendental life the gap is synthetized and incorporated to the flow of experiences. In further support of this claim, Zahavi (1997) argues that there are many everyday experiences that speak to the idea of a sub-tending form of consciousness in sleep, such as waking up earlier than usual on a particularly important day, or the fact that we can get used to waking up around

<sup>4</sup> Im faktischen Leben finden wir die Periodizität von Schlafen und Erwachen, wobei das Erwachen zugleich Erwachen über eine verfügbare Erinnerungssphäre ist, die (abgesehen von den Träumen, die im traumleeren Schlaf, wie wir meinen, ganz fehlen) mit der neuen Wachsphäre sich synthetisch vereinigt in der Form: eine Erfahrungslücke, eine erinnerungslose Sphäre ist dazwischen, in der doch die Dinge und Vorgänge weiterdauerten.



the same time to the point that we no longer require the aid of an alarm clock to do so. This shows that, even during sleep, there is an experience of time (Zahavi 1997, 141).

Lanei Rodemeyer makes use of the Husserlian distinction between near and far retention and protention, and recollection (Hua XI) to account for the type of retention that remains during sleep: every morning when I wake up in my own bed, I know where I am without having to think about it. This knowledge is part of me, it is sedimented into my body's knowledge, and it is retained in far retention as a generalization of all mornings I have woken up there, a generalization that remains with me passively as part of my consciousness.

This also explains the feeling of confusion that can arise when I wake up in an unfamiliar environment:

“Often, however, when I am away from home and staying in a hotel room, I wake up after a deep sleep, and for a moment, I don't know where I am. In order to establish where I am, I must recall the activities of the day before: travelling to this new city, checking into the hotel, unpacking, etc. Because the hotel is not part of my repeated experience, it is not part of my retained consciousness, and thus my realizing why I am there requires the effort of recollection.” (Rodemeyer 2006, 96)

Echoing the use of the notions of near and far retention, De Warren considers them crucial when it comes to considering constitution of consciousness “as a whole” and “as a life” (De Warren 2010, 287):

when I awake and open my eyes, I find all of my yesterdays in far retention return to me as well as all my tomorrows there before me, as if, despite the self-oblivion from which I am just emerging, the unity of my life, as a project of temporalization that has been and still will be, returns to itself (...) (De Warren 2010, 293).

So far, we have found that a phenomenology of sleep is not at odds with a science of sleep but rather, that the two coincide in considering that deep sleep is not a complete unconsciousness and that some conscious activity remains throughout the night. Yet, reflecting back on this activity or thematizing it in any way is at best partially possible for a phenomenological inquiry. In this sense, as it happens with other limit-cases, sleep is a limit not only in the sense that it is not able to be given in factual experience, but also insofar as it represents a boundary for phenomenological research as a whole.

#### 4. Sleep as a limit phenomenon.

As noted at the beginning of this paper, birth, death and sleep are perplexing cases for phenomenology, insofar as they have an existential significance for our individual lives, without being really given to us: “*sleep is our own-most without ever being presently mine*” (Anton 2006, 192). In order to understand the problematic character of this statement, we must first establish the structural importance of limit-cases or their “transcendental necessity”. A frequently asked question in Husserl’s dealings with limits is whether they can be considered essential features or accidental occurrences in the world (Hua 15, 172; Hua 29, 327). As Saulius Geniusas shows, this question

does not suggest that birth, death, and sleep are ultimate principles from which one could deduce particular laws that would rule over experience. Rather, this question suggest that the limit-phenomenality of birth, death, and sleep is inscribed in each and every experience in such a way that in their absence, it would remain inconceivable how experience could have obtained some of its most fundamental components. (Geniusas 2010, 76).

In his reconstruction of some of Husserl’s arguments in the C-manuscripts (Hua Mat VIII, 154-167; 422-423; 443-446), Geniusas shows how, from the standpoint of the primordial reduction -i.e without considering intersubjective constitution-, birth, death and sleep are already present in a meaningful but incomplete way. In order to show that my own temporal limits do not represent the limits of the world as a whole, a broadening of the transcendental sphere is required, in a way that accommodates intersubjective constitution of objective time. In this view, limit-cases would reach their mature explanation in a generative stage of phenomenology. No matter whether we understand generative phenomenology as a third stage in Husserl’s work, either independent (Steinbock 1995) or ultimately tied to a genetic-egological stage (Walton 2004-2005), generative phenomenology allows to explain limit phenomena as essential features of a common world and common time.

However, the broadening of the transcendental sphere in the direction of an intersubjective, historical, and social constitution, is not the only way the challenges raised by limit-cases can be tackled. There is a different direction that strays from -and could even undermine- the project of a transcendental phenomenology the way Husserl conceived it, in favor of a certain kind of naturalism. The common ground for this strategy can be broadly construed as an appeal to nature through the experience of limits. In the case of sleep, the metaphorical

use in common language of phrases like “sleeping like a log” or “like a rock” already shows the intuitive connection between sleep and the realm of Nature that has also been explored by phenomenology. In *Phenomenology of perception*, Merleau-Ponty described sleep as a way of abandoning one’s projects and becoming an “*unseeing and nearly unthinking mass*” (“*cette masse sans regard et presque sans pensées*”) (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 166-167). Sleep is in this context a resting place for a stressed will, and a state where only a feeling of one’s own body remains. In a more specific and allegedly less metaphorical sense, Merleau-Ponty also speaks in the lectures on Nature of dreaming as a manifestation of instinctual life, that we would share with some animals (Merleau-Ponty 2003, 192). Many authors, especially within the later French tradition (Nancy, Mavridis 1997, Bégout 1997) have considered limits, and particularly, sleep, to carry an intrinsic appeal to a being that precedes consciousness and that can be, for the most part, identified as a natural source of existence. Interestingly, it is in relation to sleep that we can find one of the rare passages where Husserl seems to grant the organic body a constituting character:

I wake up someone sleeping. I give him a bodily shake. I call aloud to him, and so on. The body [is] the index for psycho-physical stimuli [Reize]. It is the index for a lawfulness of the binding of hyletic prominences to the organic embodiment in its natural objective being—indeed, the lawfulness that makes possible the immanent temporal order, the grouping of hyletic data [and, hence] worldly apperception. (Hua/Mat 8, 102)<sup>5</sup>

We have mentioned Nancy’s strategy in *La tombe du sommeil*, which pointed to a separation of the for-itself and the in-itself in a sleeping human. This was already present in some of the articles that make up the volume dedicated to sleep of *Alter* magazine (1997). In the one by Mathieu Mavridis, this conflict is crystallized in the following way:

“If transcendental subjectivity is this “being” insigne which is “in and for itself”, and if dreamless sleep signifies the disappearance of human existence as the self-objectification of this transcendental subjectivity, the latter only loses its “for himself”. Doesn’t this residual “in-itself” therefore overstep the bounds

<sup>5</sup> „Den Schlafenden wecke ich, ich schüttele ihn etwa leiblich, ich rufe ihn laut etc.; der Leib, Index für psychophysische Reize. Index für eine Gesetzmäßigkeit der Bindung seiner hyletischen Abhebungen an die organische Leiblichkeit in ihrem naturalen objektiven Sein; und zwar eine solche Gesetzmäßigkeit, daß die immanent-zeitliche Ordnung, Gruppierung der hyletischen Daten mundane Apperzeption ermöglicht“. Translation by James Mensch in his 2022.

assigned by the Principle of Principles?” (Mavridis 1997, 202)

More assertive, Bruce Bégout claims:

It is the problematic nature of the sleep-event that will bring to light these “gaps” and these internal “contradictions” of subjective and psychological ideology, incapable as it is, in fact, of thinking positively about this non-phenomenal.” (Bégout 1997,14)

Even though the distinction between in-itself and for-itself is not one that Husserl would make – and this precludes the possibility of bringing Husserl immediately into this debate – the idea that sleep amounts to a certain loss is present in his own account as well. Sleep is considered a diminishing, a weakening, a darkening of certain features of experience, which up until that point seemed to be fundamental. In this sense, the “subjective ideology” at which Bégout aims is the one that construes subjectivity by describing what the active, awake ego does, and thus is only able to address passivity in negative terms. This type of “awakist bias” (Anton 2006, 182) would pervade phenomenological reflection, obscuring the fact that, as living beings, we belong to a common natural background.

Consequently, abandoning such bias seems to imply surrendering the absolute methodological primacy of the first-person point of view and making room for a naturalized phenomenology.

### 5. Sleeping reconsidered. An ontological approach.

Unlike birth and death, sleep lends itself to some form of first-personal experience (as was established in section 2), which is, nevertheless, retrospective. There are also interesting ways in which phenomenology explores a trespassing of its own possibilities. In his book, for example, Evan Thompson explores the ways meditation can broaden the sphere of what can be examined first-personally, following the sleep meditation experiences of the Hindu philosophers of the Advaita Vedanta school, who agree in considering dreamless sleep as a mode of consciousness (Thompson 2015: 240).

Compared to birth and death, sleep is a somewhat more accessible case that can be useful to consider limits in general, and phenomenology’s strategy towards them. Limit phenomena in general can contribute, as we have argued elsewhere (Ainbinder 2015, 2018, Vecino 2018, 2022), precisely to bring to the fore the insufficiency of a mere first-personal transcendental approach to the

life of consciousness – since limit-phenomena are constitutive of subjective life and yet not given as such – while, at the same time, showcasing the ineliminable character of such perspective – since no third personal naturalized account can apprehend the phenomenon in its particularities: my death is not the mere demise of a biological body, my birth is not the mere emergence of an embryo, etc.

Limit phenomena both suggest the need of naturalization and the inevitability of a transcendental perspective, requiring of phenomenology a more subtle and mediated approach. We do not want to propose that phenomenology can only save itself from the menace of naturalization by broadening, deepening or strengthening its well-known methods. Rather, we believe that the problem limit-cases present to a phenomenological inquiry are only problems if we consider them from the perspective of a naïve understanding of both phenomenology and naturalism.

Phenomenology itself however provides the tools to overcome such naïve understanding. For this last section, let us briefly turn to Heidegger as he engages in the task of an analysis of the mode of being of different entities in order to overcome some difficulties that an insufficient clarification of the phenomena at stake brings with it. Even if Heidegger does not say much about the mode of being of sleep<sup>6</sup>, his ontological approach to phenomenology as a way of overcoming its methodological naivete can prove useful in the context of the present discussion. To our knowledge Heidegger's observations on sleep are limited to what seem to be comments *en passant* in the context of two lecture courses, the *Fundamental concepts of metaphysics: world, finitude, solitude*, and the *Heraclitus seminar* from 1966-1967 with Eugen Fink. In both of these, we find indications that are not entirely coherent with the ontological *sui generis* character that is often attributed to the mode of being of humans, i.e. *Dasein*. Let's recall that in the existential analytic of *Being and Time*, Heidegger distinguishes between the modes of being of materiality or subsistence, life, and existence, where the latter characterizes *Dasein* in an exhaustive manner. That is to say that existence, which is defined by a being-by-things -i.e. by an acknowledgement of things in the world as what they are and as different from *Dasein*- pervades every one of *Dasein*'s experiences and practices, and that any subpersonal or organic mechanism - which would belong to the mode of being of life - that plays a role in our bodily self has a constituted and derived status. Regarding

<sup>6</sup> Nor does Heidegger scholarship. A noteworthy exception in this respect is Ramos Dos Reis 2020, whom we follow in our reading of Heidegger here.

our experience of sleep, this characterization already raises some questions. Can Dasein be by-things in her sleep? In his article on the topic, Corey Anton (2006) suggests that she cannot and that, therefore, “*humans live but do not exist (Dasein, verb) while they sleep*” (186). Interestingly, we see the same tension that we identified in the case of Husserlian phenomenology reappear here: certain limit phenomena challenge the possibility of clearly demarcating the realm of subjectivity – be in transcendentially, egologically or existentially conceived – and the realm of natural aspects of the subject that challenge its uniqueness<sup>7</sup>.

In the mentioned writings, Heidegger talks about sleeping plants and animals alongside humans (Heidegger 1983, 94), and discusses with Fink the idea of a dark ground that we return to in sleep, but ultimately concludes that “*the bodily in the human is not something animalistic*” (Heidegger 1970, 146). However, an interpretation of the subtle indications Heidegger gives around the subject of sleep in the direction of a reconfiguration of the ontological characterization of humans as not merely Dasein is possible. As Robson Ramos dos Reis surmises: “*the problem of the ontological meaning of sleep leads to the level of a decision over ontological monism or pluralism tied to the phenomenology of dreamless sleep.*” Through a reflection on the affective experience involved in sleep, which he considers to be the mere “*feeling of being alive*”<sup>8</sup>, he too reaches a consideration of deep sleep under the perspective of life: “*Dreamless sleep would imply that we are never mere and only Dasein, and that indeed humans that are capable of sleeping instantiate a dynamic unity of modes of being.*” (Ramos dos Reis 2020, 227).

The implications of such a consideration of sleep for Heideggerian ontology cannot be underestimated. In light of the above, human existence is no longer to be conceived in terms of a distinctive *sui generis* mode of being that, if coexists with others, is only as a result of an improper ontological clarification of what Dasein is (for example, by biological or anthropological accounts of ‘humanity’). Rather, human existence is a hybrid dynamic unity of modes of being

<sup>7</sup> For a more general and encompassing characterisation of this tension and a possible way to solve it, see Satne & Ainbinder 2019

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that this is a ‘mere’ feeling of being alive, i.e. a limit phenomenon analogous to pure passivity where there is a complete desubjectification of the ego. In this sense, it is precisely a limit phenomenon, that can only be labelled ‘feeling’ in a somehow improper sense, since there is no intentional content and therefore no experience proper. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for noting the need to clarify this point.

that overlap and constrain each other. A proper account of human subjectivity therefore requires a richer approach that overcomes such distinctions.

Of course, this dynamic does not only occur during sleep, but is in fact ever-present, which again shows the potential of sleep to consider the nature of our own being. In an analogous sense, Merleau-Ponty interestingly interprets the mimicry of being asleep that leads to actually falling asleep as an exemplary case of the interaction between ideas and things, or between existence and world, made possible through the body (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 167).

We can now revisit the challenges deep sleep posed for a transcendental phenomenology, in light of the ontological clarification of humanity as a hybrid dynamic of modes of being that a Heideggerian-inspired analysis of sleep brought to the fore. Despite the different vocabulary, a similar approach can be applied to Husserlian phenomenology. For example, the idea of an existential hybrid can be translated in Husserlian terms as the need to rethink transcendental subjectivity as transcendental *life* or *concrete subjectivity*, that is, as encompassing the radical passivity of its natural roots in a way that does not subordinate it to the active Ego and its 'awakist bias'. This is precisely what Husserl seems to be doing in some of his later reflections on the topic, especially in the C-Manuscripts. Only then will it make sense to account for the continuity of "consciousness" during deep sleep. Insofar as the organic and subpersonal processes that happen during sleep have their place in this passive ground of experience, as Mavridis or Bégout suggested, sleep does demand a certain ontological reflection. However, this does not necessarily entail a primacy of a pre-being or the undermining of the transcendental enterprise. Transcendental subjectivity can be considered a unity of different modes of being, and thus we can appeal to different methods in order to understand them, but no EEG result will ever speak for itself. This means that a complete naturalization of phenomenology will never be possible as long as our experience of ourselves and the world remains anchored to our first-personal perspective, even when we decide to grant our organic being some of its constituting status. However, the same can be said of a complete transcendental purification of subjectivity: it could only be achieved at the cost of losing sight of what Husserl called *concrete subjectivity*.

Our focus on deep sleep as a limit phenomenon and the challenges it posed find in an ontological elucidation of the mode of being of an ego that can sleep a potential pathway for a phenomenological analysis of sleep, that would make room for a methodological pluralism. Husserl's emphasis on concrete sub-

jectivity in his later work points in this direction, where the naturalization of phenomenology becomes a promising alternative that, however, does not exclude or preclude the possibility of a first personal account of sleep as part of the life of the experiencing subject. Such a subject would be at the same time a subject that constitutes the world and yet part of the continuum of nature, a subject that grounds time and yet is bound to it, a subject who lives a life stretched between birth and death and that, every few hours, goes to sleep.

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