

The Holding Back of Decline: Scheler, Patočka, and Ricoeur on Death and the Afterlife

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Abstract

Jan Patočka and Paul Ricoeur are well known for their accounts of history and the historical understanding of human life. Lesser known are their phenomenological accounts of death and the afterlife. Although their thoughts are available only in fragments, they show a peculiar theoretical richness, as their conceptions of the afterlife are connected to fundamental topics like history, intersubjectivity and memory. In my article, I will attempt to shed light on these fragments, to show how they are embedded in already existing phenomenological theories of the afterlife such as Max Scheler's essay *Tod und Fortleben*, and to trace their relation to each other. As I will try to show, Patočka and Ricoeur's thoughts can offer an alternative formulation of the phenomenology of death that differs from Martin Heidegger's analysis of death and human mortality in *Being and Time*. Such an alternative phenomenology of death would not so much focus on the authentic but rather on the intersubjective understanding of death, human mortality, and the afterlife.

Keywords: Scheler, Patočka, Ricoeur, Afterlife, Death, Survival, Memory, Immortality, Eternity

Introduction

Jan Patočka and Paul Ricoeur are well known for their accounts of history and the historical understanding of human life. Lesser known are their accounts of death and the afterlife. Their thoughts on life beyond death are available only in fragments, yet they show a peculiar theoretical richness, as their conceptions of the afterlife are connected to fundamental topics like history, intersubjectivity, and many more. In what follows, I will attempt to shed light on these fragments, to show

how they are embedded in already existing discourses, and to trace their relation to each other. As I will try to show, Patočka and Ricoeur's thoughts can offer an alternative formulation of the phenomenology of death that differs from Martin Heidegger's analysis of death and human mortality in *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1996).

For Patočka and Ricoeur, it is clear that a phenomenology of death and the afterlife must begin with a thorough account of life's intersubjective character. Against the background of the Heideggerian idea that an authentic form of being can only be reached by setting oneself apart from the spell of the "they", it seems to be clear for these two thinkers that one can only attain the full form of existence by immersing oneself in the intersubjective sphere. Moreover, they make parallel claims that one can only reach a deeper understanding of human mortality and the possibility of an afterlife through the intersubjective connectedness of human beings. In order for an afterlife to be possible, there needs to be someone who will carry my life further than I will be able to carry it. In *Critique and Conviction*, Ricoeur expressed this idea in the very powerful metaphor of the "horizontal resurrection" (Ricoeur 1998, 161), i.e. the living-on and being resurrected within the other.

At the very beginning of *Plato and Europe*, Patočka claims "that man always is essentially in a 'hopeless adventure'" (Patočka 2002, 2-3). Even though man knows that he will die, he acts or has to act as though life were eternal. He states that man is "committed to an adventure, which, in a certain sense, cannot end well" (Patočka 2002, 2-3). Simply by living, man accepts this contradiction, and so in a certain sense his mere act of breathing is already a minor revolt against mortality. Overcoming this contradiction commits man to a sphere that breaks with the egotism of the individual life. Here, we can find an idea that Filip Karfík magnificently expressed in his study as an *Unendlichwerden durch die Endlichkeit* (Karfík 2008), a becoming infinite or eternal through finitude. Living-on becomes a revolutionary act, which in the end may not win but is the specifically human attempt at resisting death, or is rather "the holding back of decline" (Patočka 2002, 3), as Patočka says.

1. Death and the Afterlife in the Phenomenological Discourse — Max Scheler

Martin Heidegger's analysis of death and mortality in *Being and Time* usually is taken as the point of origin for the phenomenological discourse on death. His thoughts figure as the foundation for the entire discourse on death in the 20th century; whether authors affirm it or critique it, it remains a touchstone. However, it is worth mentioning that the phenomenological discourse on death did not start with Heidegger but rather with Max Scheler's essay *Tod und Fortleben* (Scheler 1957), which Scheler wrote in the years 1911–1914 and expanded with two appendices in 1916. The reason why this essay is so important is the simple fact that it maintained a tension that is characteristic of the history of philosophy but one that Heidegger purposefully neglects in his reinterpretation of the problem: namely, the tension between death and eternity, or in Scheler's specific formulation, the tension between death and the afterlife, or what he calls "living-on"¹ [*Fortleben*].

Scheler's analysis is guided by one central question: why is the modern Western European civilization losing its "belief in immortality"? (*cf.* Scheler 1957) As Scheler tries to show, the rise of the natural sciences is not entirely to blame, since their rise is only a symptom of the greater change that is happening to Western European society as a whole. Scheler's bold claim is that we do not believe in immortality or the afterlife anymore because we have lost our relation to death. Scheler writes: "The type 'modern man' does not have much to say about the afterlife because he denies the core and essence of death at its roots." (Scheler 1957, 15) Hence, Scheler's essay consists of two parts: in the first part, Scheler investigates the "essence and epistemology of death" (Scheler 1957, 16-36), while he addresses the main question of "living-on" (Scheler 1957, 36-52) in the second part.

Scheler's analysis of the "essence of death" anticipates many of the crucial motives for which Heidegger's analysis became famous.² Scheler makes clear that death is not a theoretical "fact" that we know by an act of inductive logic; rather, he states that death is given for consciousness "in a

manner that is incomparable with all knowledge of experience” (Scheler 1957, 26). Scheler further argues that death is not given in the form of knowledge but rather in a manner that he calls “intuitive certainty” (Scheler 1957, 22).

The actual death presents itself always only as a confirmation unexpected after the moment and kind of its happening of an intuitive certainty that is an element of any experience. In the form of this certainty, death does not stand at the real end of life, or would be only an expectation of this end that is grounded in the experience of a different being, but rather death accompanies the entire life as a constituent part of every moment of life. (Scheler 1957, 26)

In very clear lines, he rejects the idea that death is just the mere end of life, adding nothing substantial to life. Rather the opposite is the case: as death accompanies every moment of life, death becomes what Scheler even calls the “a priori of all experience” (Scheler 1957, 18) that structures how we experience our lives and how we perceive the world, other human beings, and ourselves as human beings. Scheler shows this with remarkable clarity in the following passage:

Death is thus not a mere component of our experience, but it belongs to the essence of experience of every life, and also our own life, that experience has the direction toward death. Death belongs to the form and structure in which every single life is given to us alone, our own and every other life and this *from the inside and from the outside*. It is not the framework that comes coincidentally to an image of a single psychic or physiological process, but rather a framework that belongs to the image itself and without this framework the image would not be one of *life*. (Scheler 1957, 22)

Throughout his investigation of death and the afterlife, Scheler maintains a strictly phenomenological standpoint and method. That means that Scheler investigates death only in terms of the *how* and *what* of its givenness (Scheler 1957, 16). He brackets all judgements based on metaphysics, positive sciences, religion and even rational but abstract theories. Concerning the afterlife, he outlines three possible ways to investigate it, only the last of which he deems to be phenomenological and hence feasible. There he writes:

Sharpest distinction between the *immediate “ex-perience”* of life and world in its pure what — and all objective being, also the “lived life” that becomes manifest in lived experience: “inner perception and

observation”, and treatment of this question from this point. Only the last way is practicable. (Scheler 1957, 42)

Scheler’s treatise on the afterlife investigates the afterlife only inasmuch as it is *part* of life and not as something which comes after life or exists outside of life. By definition then he excludes every speculation that reaches beyond that which is immediately given. In his account, the afterlife can only be based on the very same experiences by which we experience life, since only these experiences are immediately given to us. In reference to Gustav Theodor Fechner’s method of “inductive metaphysics”, he argues for an “principle of immanence”, i.e. that one can only talk about the afterlife by means of analogy with the structures of life. In a very subtle move, Scheler turns Fechner’s motivation to reach beyond the confines of worldly experience into an argument for how to reach beyond the confines of life while relying on nothing other than the very experiences of life. Paraphrasing Fechner, Scheler states that one has to “transcend experience by holding the hand of experience.” (Scheler 1957, 58)

In a long and complex argument, Scheler tries to show how the human person is tied to but not reducible to their body. The body is rather the mere “expression” of the person and not the person itself. By means of showing the “essential independence” (Scheler 1957, 36) [*Wesensunabhängigkeit*] of the person from organic life, Scheler hopes to also show the independence of the person in the case of death. If the person is not reducible to the body, that would mean that the person would not cease to exist in the case of death. It would only mean that this person does not express him-/herself anymore, but the mere fact that all expression is missing does not necessarily entail that the person who does not express themselves has ceased to exist. In the lecture *Das Wesen des Todes* from 1923/24, Scheler sketches the somewhat witty illustration of slamming the door on Hans, whom I do not see now anymore behind the closed door. But the fact that I do not see Hans anymore with the door closed does not mean that Hans does not exist anymore behind that door, or anywhere else for that matter. It merely means that I cannot see Hans expressing himself anymore (Scheler 1987, 302).

Since Scheler understands the human being as a “spiritual person” [*geistige Person*], he prohibits any reduction of the person to the body. His argument reaches even further since he will hold that the spiritual person in fact cannot even be seen during life. Scheler argues: “This spiritual person is ‘invisible’ so to speak even when I talk to her or when she expresses herself. That we do not see her after death says very little since one cannot see her in a sensory way in any case.” (Scheler 1957, 37) This argument is interesting not so much for its claim regarding the existence of the spiritual person in the afterlife, but rather because it posits the immaterial existence of the person in life as well as in death. For this, Scheler finds the very interesting metaphor of the “swinging out and beyond” (Scheler 1957, 47) [*Fort- und Hinausschwingen*] of the spiritual person. In his argument, the human person is defined by and mainly exists through spiritual acts, feelings and values. In these very acts, the person is not reducible to his or her body; further, more than one person can partake in the same spiritual act, such as feelings, values, etc. (Scheler 1973, 23-24) In these acts, “my spirit as feeling swings beyond the confines of the states of my body.” (Scheler 1957, 45) Since this is the case already during life, it is very likely that this also holds true for death. And since the spiritual person swings beyond the very moment in which the person exists, it is highly likely that the person will also transcend this unshakable moment of death.

What is interesting in Scheler’s work regarding the question concerning the afterlife in Patočka and Ricoeur, however, is the simple idea that the person is not confined by its bodily existence. Even more, the body does not figure as the container of the person since the subject is able to transcend its bodily existence. In the spiritual acts that Scheler outlines, subjects can transcend their bodily confines and exist with each other beyond their bodily vessels. Since the body is not identical to the spiritual person, this means that the spiritual person could possibly live on in a non-bodily manner. Although this sounds like the traditional split between body and soul, Scheler’s position is more nuanced since he argues for an *essential* connection between body and spirit that serves as the very basis for the definition of the person (Scheler 1957, 48-49).

Scheler's focus on the afterlife restricts itself to an analysis of how the person experiences this afterlife. These thoughts raise the question: how could one address the afterlife in a more elaborate way, i.e. by taking into account the intersubjective condition of human life?

2. The Other in Me, I in the Other — Jan Patočka

In a fragment that was probably written in the late 1960s³ called *Phénoménologie de la vie après la mort*, Jan Patočka thinks about how one could approach the afterlife in a theoretically coherent way. In his analysis, he does not want to repeat the classical “mistakes” in the history of philosophy, such as positing a dualism between the body and the soul. In the very beginning of the text, Patočka states that in the philosophical tradition, this question has been reduced to “the question of the mortality or immortality of the soul”⁴ [*la question de la mortalité ou de l’immortalité de l’âme*] (Patočka 1995, 145). However, he holds that this idea of the soul is a “metaphysical fiction, an invention of the dualistic philosophy” [*une fiction métaphysique, une invention de la philosophie dualiste*] (Patočka 1995, 145). Patočka solely investigates how an afterlife could take place or have its basis within the very structures of our lifeworld. Hence, Patočka thinks that “phenomenology provides [...] a methodical apparatus which makes possible such a questioning.” [*La phénoménologie fournit [...] un appareil méthodique qui rend possible un tel questionnement*] (Patočka 1995, 145). Patočka's connection to Scheler's phenomenology of death and the afterlife here seems obvious since they share the aim and method of treating the question of the afterlife solely within the realms of experience and its systematic observation and explication.

Like Scheler, Patočka eschews philosophical speculations and begins with what is immediately given, namely the concrete experience of life itself. In contrast to Scheler, Patočka does not focus on how life is structured by death. Rather, he turns to a fundamentally constitutive feature of our lives, and that is: intersubjectivity.⁵ According to his thoughts, life is essentially intersubjective and hence, every phenomenology of the afterlife would have to take into account

this essential structure. In Patočka's own words: "Life is essentially life with others" [*La vie est essentiellement vie avec les autres*] (Patočka 1995, 151). Since this life with others is the primordial sphere of all considerations of death and the afterlife, the two extreme cases of death and afterlife must figure as profound modifications of this primordial sphere — the question therefore is how death and the afterlife modify the very structures of life and life with others. The above cited passage is striking in its context:

Life is essentially life with others, and the other who has withdrawn from it does not cease to be simply by ceasing to be according to the mode of presence. His being is according to the mode of definitive absence, fundamentally different from non-being, and this *stéresis* has a content of life that is essentially positive. Life after death is thus originally a privative mode of life with the other under all its fundamental figures. (Patočka 1995, 151)

[La vie est essentiellement vie avec les autres, et l'autre qui s'en est retiré ne cesse pas d'être simplement en cessant d'être selon le mode de la présence. Son être est selon le mode de l'absence définitive, foncièrement différent du non-être, et cette stéresis a un contenu de vie essentiellement positif. La vie après la mort est ainsi originellement un mode privatif de la vie avec l'autre sous toutes ses figures fondamentales.]

Patočka embeds his theory of death and the afterlife in a very sophisticated theory of intersubjectivity. In this theory, Patočka distinguishes five aspects of our complex relation with ourselves and the other (Patočka 1995, 146-147)⁶: 1. my being within me [*mon être en moi-même*], 2. my being for myself [*mon être pour moi-même*], 3. my being for the other [*mon être pour autrui*], 4. the being of the other for me [*l'être de l'autre pour moi*], and 5. my being in itself [*mon être en soi*]. This fivefold structure highlights the nuances of how I relate to the other, how the other relates to me, and how I relate to myself. As such, this structure lays the groundwork for understanding how the experience of death transforms that intertwined relationship and how it prevails or is modified in what Patočka calls the afterlife. Let us look more closely at each of the components of this fivefold structure:

1. My being within me [*mon être en moi-même*] is the very ground on which everything is built. It is the being within

me that I cannot touch and which constantly actualizes itself anew. As such, it is not accessible to the other, and it is not even accessible to me since it is the very basis of who I am and of the mere fact of my existence. As such, it is not objectifiable since I lack the necessary distance to do this; I cannot take an independent stance on it.

2. My being for myself [*mon être pour moi-même*] is different from my being within me precisely in the aspect of objectification. Whereas I cannot reflect upon or objectify my being within me, I can of course reflect upon myself and make it an object of my ponderings. This reflection presupposes a distance that I create within myself, namely between the subject that is me and the subject that I am for myself. Filip Karfik expresses this poignantly: “It is not my being anymore insofar as it lives, but rather insofar as it is experienced.”⁷ (Karfik 2008, 83) [*Es ist nicht mehr mein Sein, insofern es lebt, sondern insofern es erlebt wird.*]

3. My being for the other [*mon être pour autrui*] is how I am perceived and experienced by the other. This is significant insofar as this component of my intersubjective relations does not originate within me. Whereas my being within me was not accessible to me because of the lack of distance that I have towards myself, my being for the other is not accessible to me since the point of origin of this relation does not originate within me. To put it otherwise: this form of being is a being that I cannot be for myself but which is given to me by the other.

4. The being of the other for me [*l'être de l'autre pour moi*] is the inversion of my being for the other. This means that the other has a being which he is not for himself but which he is given through me. In this respect, the self does not coincide with itself; this mode of existence does not originate in and is not for a self, hence it provides the leeway for a being which transcends itself beyond the narrow confines of its physical existence. This will become especially important in Patočka's treatise of the afterlife within the narrow confines of life.

5. Finally, my being in itself [*mon être en soi*] consists of all the former four components but does not coincide with them. It is based on my being within me, the possibility to reflect upon myself and my being for the others, but also the impact that

others have upon me. As such, it concerns my project for my own being in this world as a whole, which is shaped by this complex intersubjective interplay and my own relation with myself.

What is so interesting in Patočka's conception of intersubjectivity is that it goes against the entire discussion of a phenomenology of death that stems from Heidegger's analyses in *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1996, §§ 46-53). In the infamous §47, Heidegger frames the question of the importance of my own death and the death of the other as a matter of how we gain access to the experience of death. Here, the problem is that one never fully experience one's own death, since death interrupts the very relation between the subject and the object of experience. Hence, Heidegger very quickly dismisses this "experience of death" as a possible basis for a phenomenological investigation of death. Instead, he turns to the death of the other, which he dismisses all too quickly.⁸

Whereas death interrupts the correlation between the subject and the object, this is not the case with the death of the other. No matter how painful this experience might be, we can observe the process of another person's dying without being lifted out of the experience. However, this seems to be exactly the problem since we can experience death as it unfolds phenomenologically, but we do not get an insight into what death means *to us*. This motivated Heidegger's infamous claim:

Death does reveal itself as a loss, but as a loss experienced by those remaining behind. However, in suffering the loss, the loss of being as such which the dying person "suffers" does not become accessible. We do not experience the dying of others in a genuine sense; we are at best always just "there" too. (Heidegger 1996, 222)

In short, Heidegger assigns little importance to the death of the other and instead emphasizes the primacy of the subject's experience. The death of the other is something which happens to a fully constituted subject and is therefore of only accidental importance. Patočka's conception of intersubjectivity seems richer here since his conception does not fall into the trap of understanding human mortality through the very process of death. On the contrary, his conception of subjectivity is a non-foundational concept of intersubjectivity, which means that intersubjectivity is manifest through an intertwinement of self

and other that lacks a single primary point of origin. As Filip Karfik puts it:

[A]ll this leads at last to a conception of intersubjectivity in which there is just as little priority of the I in relation to the other as there is priority of the other in relation to me and in which one can only discuss the different aspects of the I and the other in its mutual intertwinement. (Karfik 2008, 84)

[[A]ll das mündet zuletzt in eine Konzeption der Intersubjektivität, in der es eine Priorität des Ich in bezug auf den anderen ebenso wenig gibt wie eine des anderen in bezug auf mich und in der man lediglich über die verschiedenen Aspekte des Ich und des anderen in ihrer gegenseitigen Verflochtenheit sprechen kann.]

Patočka's focus on this mutual intertwinement gives him the means to develop an account of human intersubjectivity in its richness and without reducing the other to my projects as a mere means towards authenticity. Instead, Patočka puts all the emphasis on what he calls "reciprocity", i.e. that idea that I keep the other within me and the other keeps me within him, or to give it great terminological precision: there is a reciprocity of my being for the other and the being of the other for me. Since this is also connected to my own being for myself, this leads to the dynamic that I somehow need the other in order to reach myself in the higher sense, i.e. my being in itself. Hence, this reciprocity between me and the other is of crucial importance:

Reciprocity is the fundamental factor in the synchrony of the two originalities: the originality of the being of the other for me (with my consciousness of its originality for himself) and my originality for the other (with his consciousness of my being original in myself). (Patočka 1995, 148)

[La réciprocité est le facteur fondamental de la synchronie des deux originalités : l'originalité de l'être de l'autre pour moi (avec ma conscience de son originalité pour soi) et mon originalité pour l'autre (avec sa conscience de mon être original en moi-même).]

With reference to Hegel and Alexandre Kojève's interpretation of Hegel, Patočka tries to show that this reciprocity is not just based on the fact that I need the other and the other needs me; rather it expresses that peculiar and complex relationship with the other in which I even need the other's need for me. Patočka develops this further in a comparably long discussion of Jean-Paul Sartre where he

analyses the structure of desire and how I not only desire the other but also desire the desire of the other for me. I do not want to lead us astray from the discussion of death and the afterlife, but reciprocity is a useful way to show how complex those topics become in relation to human intersubjectivity and how such a conception of intersubjectivity can be a means to show the true complexity of a possible life after death within the very structures of the intersubjective lifeworld.

As Hans Ruin points out in his analysis, it is in this sense that “we live through each other” (Ruin 2015). This points to a possibility where the structures designated as “my being for the other” and conversely, “the being of the other for me” make the possibility of an afterlife intelligible. In the case of my death, the other keeps me within him and in case of his death, I keep the other within me. As Ruin puts it, Patočka focuses on “this strange phenomenon of how the dead other continues to live, and thus how, in a certain sense, there is life after death” (Ruin 2015). And to be more precise, Patočka’s investigation centers on how there is life after death but strictly within the realms of life itself and through this sophisticated concept of intersubjectivity.

The remarkable fact is that Patočka, in the very few lines of this fragment, arrived at an understanding of not only the afterlife but moreover an understanding of an intersubjectively shared human mortality. It is an understanding that we live *with, through, and among* the dead and that the dead live within us, through us, and among us.⁹ It is in that sense that one could think — phenomenologically speaking — of a transgenerational notion of life or even a quasi-eternity that manifests itself in the very midst of our contingent and finite lives. As Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback stresses, this also leads to the problem that one has to think in some way of a transgenerational notion of responsibility, which she tries to develop under the title of an “a-subjective negative responsibility” (Sá Cavalcante Schuback 2014, 43-60). This urge to think about ways of engaging with this peculiar life after death stems from the fact that, from this perspective, the “living being is indeed always a life after the death of others, living

existence is not only co-existent with other living beings but also with no longer living beings” (Sá Cavalcante Schuback 2014, 58).

Patočka’s remarkable fragment not only demonstrates a phenomenologically sound and interesting way to deal with death and the afterlife within the very boundaries of life itself, it gives way to a very interesting and fruitful conception of intersubjectivity that captures the true richness and depth of mutual intersubjective relations and exchanges. Patočka manages to show how we become ourselves through others and in doing so he levels a scathing critique at Heidegger’s narrow notion of authenticity. In his fragment, Patočka is able to show that there is indeed a form of authenticity in which I only reach an authentic self with the help of the other and vice versa. In the specific discussion of human mortality, Patočka undermines many of the common and very well known arguments that are framed in terms of the opposition between the experience of my own death and the death of the other. Patočka is able to show that our very lifeworld is not only a world of the living; others who have already departed haunt this very lifeworld, others who we keep alive by carrying them within us.

3. Horizontal Resurrection — Paul Ricoeur

In the final decade of his life, Ricoeur worked on a variety of thoughts which gravitated around the topics of history, memory, and death. The clearest exposition of this complex of ideas can be found in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Ricoeur 2004, 343-368) where Ricoeur tries to frame the *conditio historica* in reference to Martin Heidegger’s accounts of human mortality and historicity. There, he proposes “an alternative reading of the meaning of mortality”. He states: “This reading without pretension would pave the way for a multiple attribution of dying: to the self, to close relations, to others; and among all these others, the dead of the past, which the retrospective gaze of history embraces” (Ricoeur 2004, 350). In other words, his analysis of mortality pays attention to these aspects of mortality that Heidegger’s analysis of death either neglected or perhaps even consciously suspended. Whereas Heidegger calls any understanding of the other’s death (or the mediation of one’s own death through the other) “inauthentic”,

Ricoeur seems to start exactly with these aspects of death: others in close and distant relations, or even the dead others encountered through history.

Among the many things that Ricoeur tries to consider in his approach — including a completely under-investigated topic in phenomenological research: the relation between death and the body (Ricoeur 2004, 345; 357—358) —, he focuses on what he calls the “plurality” of mortality. He pursues the question: “What is there to say about death in light of our manner of being among other humans — regarding the *inter-esse* that Heidegger expresses in the vocabulary of *Mitsein*?” (Ricoeur 2004, 359). By going in this direction, it is hardly surprising to see that Ricoeur engages with a reading of Emmanuel Lévinas as a correction of that under-representation of the other in Heidegger’s analysis. But before he does this, he clearly formulates his critique of Heidegger while outlining the unexplored paths that his analysis offers.

First and foremost, he states that the Heideggerian approach suspends and even avoids the question of how our relation to the departed other may open up revelatory ways of relating to death. The experiences of loss and mourning should not be seen as an obstruction to an authentic understanding of death but could indeed be a way to even get to the truth of the phenomenon of death. Ricoeur writes:

What it is important to plumb instead are the resources of veracity concealed in the experience of losing a loved one, placed back into the perspective of the difficult work of reappropriation of the knowledge about death. Along the road that passes through the death of the other — another figure of the detour — we learn two things in succession: loss and mourning. (Ricoeur 2004, 359)

Loss and mourning are the most fundamental “positive” phenomena that have to do with the question of death and which Heidegger failed to consider (Derrida 2001; cf. Sternad 2012). It is through the experience of loss and mourning that we are carried towards a deeper understanding of death which Heidegger dismisses as being within the realm of the “they” and hence as being inauthentic. As Ricoeur writes, “Loss and mourning display [...] unprecedented forms that contribute to our most intimate apprenticeship of death” (Ricoeur 2004, 360).

Although the loss of the other is only an external event of death as Heidegger would have it, it is itself a positive phenomenon of death. We experience death first and foremost as the loss of a beloved other; we experience it through the mourning in which we keep the departed other with us. The loss of the other and the subsequent mourning is a way of growing into the phenomenon of death and which also prepares oneself for one's own death. In fact, there is no learning how to die without mourning for the death of the beloved other. Ricoeur goes even further and claims that the death of the other is even connected to the identity of the self since it points to a partial loss of the self:

As for loss, separation as rupture of communication — the deceased, someone who no longer answers — constitutes a genuine amputation of oneself to the extent that the relation with the one who has disappeared forms an integral part of one's self-identity. The loss of the other is in a way the loss of self and as such constitutes a stage along the path of "anticipation". (Ricoeur 2004, 359)

This rupture of communication happens in every single case of death, in our relation with our beloved others but also in society in general. However, it is also the case in history since history as such is the presence of an astonishing legion of the dead. Paraphrasing Ricoeur, we can say that being historical is to be with the dead (Ricoeur 2004, 364). Indeed, history is the memory of those who passed, or in Ricoeur's own words: "Death marks, so to speak, the absent in history" (Ricoeur 2004, 365). As such, history becomes the peculiar afterlife of our (collective) memory¹⁰ in which we keep the dead with us in our memory and allow them to still live through us today. However, such a perspective is only possible if one moves away from the narrow discourse Heidegger set up, since all these phenomena would not be of interest for Heidegger. Even more, Heidegger would discredit these phenomena as mere "cases of death" which only allow for an inauthentic understanding of death (Heidegger 1996, § 52).

In 1995/96, Ricoeur began writing some fragments on death, which were collected and published posthumously in *Living up to Death* (Ricoeur 2009). Although they are just fragments, they deal with death in a rather systematic way and connect with his thoughts in *Memory, History, Forgetting* concerning the intersubjective dimension of death. Among these

many fragments, one can find a rather consistent and longer text with the title *Up to Death. Mourning and Cheerfulness* (Ricoeur 2009, 1-55) in which he develops all the main motives of his thought. In the opening of these fragments, one can find a little sketch of how Ricoeur wanted to elaborate his thoughts on death. He writes:

The living and the dead?
No, the living and the memory of the dead in the memory of the living.
Bond of memory. (Ricoeur 2009, 4)

From the very first page of these fragments, Ricoeur treats death in relation to intersubjectivity. This is only comprehensible if one takes the aforementioned considerations in *Memory, History, Forgetting* into account, i.e. that Ricoeur regarded the Heideggerian discourse as incomplete and in some respects even misleading. By taking the other as a starting point for his reflections, Ricoeur shows that his analysis will go in a completely different direction from that of Heidegger. And in fact, his considerations follow three key problems, which from the very onset show themselves to be the missing aspects in the traditional discourse departing from Heidegger.

In a first step, he turns to the death of the other. In a second step, he reflects upon the impossibility of an experience of death from a first person perspective. Hence, he will shift from an experience of death to an experience of being with the beloved dying or dead person. In a third consideration, he addresses the very complex idea of survival, mainly against the background of the Holocaust and the testaments of survival Jorge Semprun and Primo Levi articulate. One can easily see what severe consequences his thoughts and his methodological shift brings about if one considers this trauma of civilization and the complex question of memory that comes with it. Here, I will only deal with the key methodological idea in the first step and unfold it against the background of our discussion of Max Scheler and Jan Patočka.

It was Emmanuel Lévinas who in *God, Death, and Time* claimed: "The death of the other: therein lies the first death" (Lévinas 2000, 43). This statement has been understood as the most radical critique of Heidegger's analysis of death, hence it

provoked a methodological reflection on the proper departure point for an adequate analysis of death. Ricoeur seems to repeat this radical gesture when he also raises the question of where to begin. His first reflection begins with the straightforward statement: “There is first of all the encounter with the death of a loved other, of unknown others” (Ricoeur 2009, 8). In this short statement, Ricoeur makes clear that the encounter with the death of the other is the starting point for every reflection on death. This unshakable event of death provokes a peculiar question within the one who survives: “[W]hat are, where are, how are the dead?” (Ricoeur 2009, 9) The survivor has to ask himself the question “what has been lost?” and “in what sense does the departed remain here?” The peculiar, painful and unique moment of the death of the other consists in that strange problem: how could it be that this beloved person was just here, and somehow still lingers here but proves to be gone at the same time? This strange moment demands an answer that tells us about the kind of existence that just has been erased but also tells us about the possible continuing existence that follows after the erasure.

It is clear that this “continuing existence” is completely different from how the living continue existing. The life after death becomes a question of survival. How does the survivor keep the dead alive? And what does that mean for the peculiar form of intersubjective existence we have with one another during our lifetimes? Here, Ricoeur touches upon a very complex relation that I maintain with the other and the other maintains with me. This relation will be first and foremost a temporal relation, of shared time within life but also a time that transcends death in both directions: from the living to the future dead, and from the already dead to the still living. Regarding this complex relation, Ricoeur writes:

It is tomorrow’s [dead], in the future perfect tense, so to speak, that I imagine. And it is this image of the dead person I will be for others that takes up all the room, with its load of questions: what are, where are, how are the dead?¹¹ (Ricoeur 2009, 9)

The dead will be kept alive in the memory of the living. But it is also already during life, that the living as “future dead” relate to the others as possible survivors, as the future

keepers of their memories. They will be the survivors of my death and they will keep the memory of me within them and hence allow for a peculiar afterlife of mine, which I will not be there to experience. Since this is a mutual structure in the realm of intersubjectivity, one has to take this up as a “positive” phenomenon, and moreover, a phenomenon of the afterlife within the realm of life itself. Jacques Derrida, in his *Memoires: for Paul de Man*, beautifully describes this signature of death within life: “[E]verything that we inscribe in the living present of our relation to others already carries, always, the signature of *memoirs-from-beyond-the-grave*” (Derrida 1989, 29).

One can easily see now, that death is a phenomenon which has in its core this signature of intersubjectivity and life. To think about the afterlife in Ricoeur’s sense, requires that we first and foremost think about the other and to think about the specific relationship that I maintain with the other. As Ricoeur puts it:

The question of survival is thus first of all a question about the survivors who ask themselves whether the dead do continue to exist, in the same chronological time or at least in a temporal register parallel to that of the living, even if this mode of time is held to be imperceptible. (Ricoeur 2009, 10)

In one of the attached fragments, he finds an even more pithy formulation; there he states in a fashion that reminds one of Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Huis clos*: “Survival is the others” (Ricoeur 2009, 41; cf. Sartre 1989, 45). The others become my survival. If there is an afterlife at all, then one can only think this peculiar afterlife in this context of intersubjectivity. Hence, the phenomenon of death is a phenomenon of intersubjectivity. And the phenomenon of the afterlife is a phenomenon of survival. In both cases however, the phenomenon of death and the afterlife is a phenomenon of life. Only within life can all these structures arise and unfold their complex relationship.

In conclusion, one can say that Ricoeur emphasizes aspects that are generally missing in the Heideggerian discourse on death. Aspects such as intersubjectivity, memory, the body, etc., seem to be the primary starting point for Ricoeur. In the case of memory, Ricoeur develops an impressive conception of how the dead live-on within the realm of the

living. Hence, his conception of the afterlife is first and foremost situated within the realms of life and intersubjectivity. Like Scheler and Patočka before him, Ricoeur too seems to follow the phenomenological demand that we analyse the afterlife solely in terms of how it is given within experience. By taking into account the importance of the experience of the loss of the other and the mourning for the other, his reflections work as a profound correction of the limitations of the Heideggerian discourse. In addition, his reflections open up a way to approach the potentially eternal persistence of the dead others within the memory of history. Since the living keep the dead alive in their memory, this of course leads to a certain politics of remembrance, which we can only point to here.

4. Conclusion

Phenomenology is well known for its rich exploration of death and human mortality. According to the main premises of the phenomenological method, this exploration restricts itself to an analysis of how death appears in the structures of our meaningful world. In doing so, it embraces all assumptions conveyed by culture, religion, society, etc. As Hans Ebeling once emphasized, this can be conceived of as a major turning point in philosophical thanatology, since death ceases to be the transition into something unknown, but becomes the irrevocable end that nevertheless constitutes the very meaningful structures of our lives (Ricoeur 2009, 41).

Given these methodological premises however, phenomenology loses a question that has driven philosophy from the very beginning and that is the question concerning the relation between time and eternity — the relation between life and the afterlife, however it is imagined. Up to this point, only a few phenomenologists dared to think of this peculiar afterlife in a phenomenological way. Among these few phenomenologists, Max Scheler, Jan Patočka, and Paul Ricoeur are the only thinkers who thought about the afterlife in a methodically consistent way.

In their accounts, the afterlife is not a phenomenon that comes after life's end. Instead, they all try to situate the afterlife within the realm of life, since the phenomenological method can only give a clear account of this quasi-phenomenon

within the realm of life. The evanescent phenomenon of the afterlife hence gains a very concrete materiality that it otherwise lacks.

Instead of framing this afterlife as a mysterious ghost that lingers around among the living, their accounts focus on one of the most evident structures of everyone's life, i.e. intersubjectivity. Especially in Patočka and Ricoeur's accounts, we see the afterlife as a phenomenon that we can only observe in the intersubjective sphere. It is the complex intersubjective relationship that keeps the other within me and myself within the other. In this way, the departed still continue to live among the living and in a way, the lifeworld becomes permeated by "that which is no longer", namely a world filled with the dead. We keep our beloved with us, we keep unknown others with us, and in fact, we keep historical others with us.

It is in this sense that our relation with the other is always already marked by this signature beyond the grave, as Jacques Derrida put it. We encounter the other as the possible keeper of our memory and hence as our only way to go beyond the irrevocable threshold of death. If there is a possibility to survive death, then this possibility is only thinkable by means of our relation to the other. Heidegger's analysis of death was blind to this as he put all the emphasis on the relation to our own death. By putting all the emphasis on the "non-relationality"¹² of death, his analysis fails to account for the very ways in which we live together as mortals and mutually share our mortality — and together even reach beyond the confines of the limits of our individual lives.

When Patočka formulated his thoughts on our essentially "hopeless adventure" (Patočka, 2-3), he had in mind the break-through of our individual life to eternity by means of philosophy. Yet, this breakthrough could also be thought differently, by means of the other, all the others with whom and through whom we are holding back the inevitable decline.

NOTES

¹ Scheler's *Tod und Fortleben* is not yet translated into English. All English quotes are translated by the author of this article with the help of an unpublished

draft-translation by Zachary Davis whom I want to thank for generously sharing the draft of his translation with me.

² Although the essay remained unpublished, it is difficult to believe that Heidegger was unacquainted with Scheler's ideas on death in one way or another, mostly likely through conversation. One of the terminological traces of Scheler's essay can be seen in the following sentence in Heidegger's *Being and Time* where Heidegger discusses the methodological exclusion of the afterlife from his questioning: "If death is defined as the 'end' of *Da-sein*, that is, of being-in-the-world, no ontic decision has been made as to whether 'after death' another being is still possible, either higher or lower, whether *Da-sein* 'lives on' or even, 'outliving itself,' is 'immortal.'" (Heidegger 1996, 230). [*Wenn der Tod als 'Ende' des Daseins, das heißt des In-der-Welt-seins bestimmt wird, dann fällt damit keine ontische Entscheidung darüber, ob 'nach dem Tode' noch ein anderes, höheres oder niedrigeres Sein möglich ist, ob das Dasein 'fortlebt' oder gar, sich 'überdauernd', 'unsterblich' ist.*]

³ Cf. Erika Abrams in the bibliographical notes: Patočka 1995, 295. Abrams mentions a rumour according to which this fragment might have been written upon the death of Patočka's wife in 1967.

⁴ All quotes in English are translations by the author of this article, C.S. As reference posed the French translation of Erika Abrams and Filip Karfik's critical annotations in: Karfik 2008, 82-100; especially 87, 90. For clarification of the Czech original, I am thankful to Daniel Leufer.

⁵ Also Hans Ruin mentions that Patočka takes intersubjectivity as his "starting point": Ruin 2015.

⁶ For a very clear depiction of this fivefold structure, see: Karfik 2008, 82-83.

⁷ Translation by the author of this article, C.S.

⁸ One of the earliest critiques was advanced by Dolf Sternberger, who in 1931 wrote his dissertation *Der verstandene Tod* under Paul Tillich solely on §47 and the question of the death of the other. See Sternberger, 1981.

⁹ I tried to show this mechanism in reference to Jacques Derrida's conception of hauntology in: Sternad, 2015.

¹⁰ This term was coined by Maurice Halbwachs who looms large in Ricoeur's thoughts. Cf. Halbwachs, 1992.

¹¹ Modified translation of the French because of a mistake in translation: "le mort" in this sentence clearly refers to "the dead" and not to "death".

¹² Heidegger defines death as that "possibility which is one's ownmost, non-relational, not to be outstripped, certain, and yet indefinite." (Heidegger 1962, 356).

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